



JUST LOVE YOUR SON

GARRET PASSMORE

Contents

Forward	2
Inner Thoughts	9
Chapter 1 The End	11
Chapter 2 The Beginning	13
Chapter 3 Accident	34
Chapter 4 Collateral Damage	60
Chapter 5 Normalcy Returns	76
Chapter 6 A Turn of Events	105
Chapter 7 Doug's Fiancé	126
Chapter 8 Hopes Dashed	149
Chapter 9 Spurious Knowledge	170
Chapter 10 A Positive Outlook	198
Chapter 11 The Good Life	220
Chapter 12 Hopeful Changes	243
Chapter 13 A Pillar of Support	260
Chapter 14 Rollercoaster	274
Chapter 15 Dark Days	292
Jeanine's Open Letter to Doug	318
Stories by Jeanine	325
Afterwords	347

Forward

On November 22, 1993, Doug exhaled for the last time as he lay in his Berkley, California bed. He was a tall, good-looking man with golden wavy hair and a strong, square chin. He lay gasping for his last breath after contracting a lung infection. His immune system was compromised from AIDS,¹ and could not fight the infection. He was gone, at a young age, to a disease relatively new to the world. Thirty-something was much too young to die.

The following month, Doug's family held a memorial service in Goshen, Idaho where he was raised. I was there. One of the fondest memories Jeanine had of her son was seeing *Doctor*

¹ *Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome*

*Zhivago*² with him. At the service, a solo artist was brought in to sing “Somewhere My Love.”³ Jeanine sat with her head bowed as she wept.

Thirty-something years later Jeanine lay gasping for her last breath. She had succumbed to a relatively new disease. We called her a victim of a pandemic. Her red hair was almost all gray now. I saw Jeanine lying there. Jeanine was a pioneer. She would be buried in the high desert plains.

In disposing of her worldly goods, I came across a copy of the Berkeley, California obituary saying Doug had “owned and operated his own cosmetology business.”

² *Doctor Zhivago* is a 1965 romance film based upon a 1957 novel by Boris Pasternak. The story is set in Russia during World War I and the Russian revolution.

³ “Somewhere My Love” was the billing on the program but is perhaps better known as “Lara’s Theme” from the movie, *Doctor Zhivago*.

I reflected on these events, noting Jeanine was a pioneering advocate for LGBTQ+⁴ rights before those rights were cool. An article published December 5, 1993, in Idaho's *Post Register* newspaper entitled, "Breaking Silence: Family talks about son's death from AIDS" was groundbreaking for the area at that time. The article started out by saying:

He isn't the first Idahoan to die of the disease and he won't be the last, but his obituary was one of the few to list acquired immune deficiency syndrome⁵ as the cause of death.

For the Nelson family, there was no other choice. Their son had always been open with them about his homosexuality, and they had nothing to hide.

⁴ LGBTQ+ is an acronym meaning lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (sexuality or gender) and whatever else we might not think of.

⁵ This is perhaps better known as *AIDS*.

“One of my sons said, ‘Mom, if we don’t put this in there, it’s like we’re ashamed of something and we’re not,’” said Jeanine McLing Nelson.

“We felt we had to be honest,” she said. “It’s just a fact. It’s a fact he lived with and suffered terribly from.”

“The decision was characteristic,” said Gene Cornia, bishop⁶ of the LDS ward the family attends.

“Knowing the Nelsons, it didn’t surprise me; they loved their son very much,” he said. “They are forward and open because they want people to learn from them.”

⁶ A bishop’s calling of service usually lasts five years. In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints a member would use the phrase of “Bishop Cornia.” Except for this quote from this newspaper, this book will simply say, “the bishop” in place of the usual use of “Bishop [Last Name].” “President [Last Name] will be changed to “the stake president.” Doctor [Last Name] will be changed to “the doctor.” Other names are incomplete, altered, or completely changed.

The article went on to say:

“Most families are reluctant to list AIDS as a cause of death, leading many to think it’s a disease that doesn’t touch this state...But it does.”

The article mentioned the positive actions Jeanine took by stating:

“Many friends found out Douglas was gay and had HIV⁷ only when Nelson needed their help to pressure the federal government to release the drugs DDI⁸ and DDC⁹, which along with AZT¹⁰, are the only medications used to treat the disease.

⁷ Human immunodeficiency virus

⁸ Didanosine is sold under the name of Videx and approved for use in 1991.

⁹ Dideoxycytidine was sold under the name of Hivid and approved for use in 1992 and discontinued in 2006.

¹⁰ Azidothymidine, also called zidovudine, was first used in 1987 to treat cancer. AZT is sold under various names such as Retrovir.

When she called an Idaho senator for help and was told AIDS wasn't an Idaho problem, she called friends, relatives, and acquaintances and asked them to call. The next day, one of the senator's staffers acknowledged that perhaps it was a problem in the state.

The number of AIDS cases has almost doubled in the last year...That's one of the reason's the family has been open about his disease.

The response to the obituary has been positive. Friends and strangers have called to thank the Nelson's for their candor. One caller said their actions might even save some lives."

The article concludes with the remarks of Jeanine:

"We have to love and accept our children as they are," she said.

"One of the things I'm grateful for is that so many of these kids die unloved," she said, crying, "but, one of the blessings in my life is my son knew how much we loved him."

Jeanine planned on writing a book about her son. Jeanine wanted to call the book, *Just Love Your Son* but, Jeanine did not complete it. I heard the tapes Jeanine made. I poured over the things Jeanine had written. I put them together. What follows is her story.

Inner Thoughts

Like Mohandas Gandhi said, “My life is my message,” and this book is my message to the world. The things written here are my inner thoughts about my life and how they have shaped my attitudes. This book might seem to some to be a story about me.

This story is about love. This is a story about how I tried to find the answers and ended up facing the answer. I wasted a lot of time trying to change the answers to my expectations instead of what really was. This story is about how God teaches us to love by giving us the opportunity of becoming parents.

We have the opportunity to love our children no matter what. When we do this we can understand God’s love for us, no matter what. When we suffer for love’s sake, we learn a great deal of wisdom. Perhaps everything terrible is just something that needs loved.

Let the readers decide whether these thoughts are of value or not. At sometime, someday, maybe someone will want to know what I learned from all of this, and what went on in my inner thoughts.

Finding hope in love is why this book exists.

The End

Chapter 1

In tears, I put the phone down. I expected this. I dreaded this: a call for, which I was still unprepared. My legs were weak and shaky. I sat on the bed trying to catch my breath. Thoughts tumbled through my mind.

“I must pray,” I thought.

It took several moments to get enough strength to sink to my knees beside the bed. Starting to sob, I poured my heart out to the Lord. The pain was intense.

For years I had prayed for my son, Doug. His life slowly ebbed away over the years. I prayed for hope against hope from the devastating results of AIDS. I prayed for Doug to have moments free of pain, for the nausea and diarrhea to end. I had received strength. Now, I was praying to the Lord to take him gently.

As my strength returned, I began to mentally list all of the things I must do. I dialed my husband's work number. He answered. I wished I could spare him the pain he was about to experience. Our son, Doug, was the focus of our lives these last few years. We loved him. We're going to miss him.

Next I called the other children. I lay back on the bed to call. My husband, Deloy, and the children were on their way. Closing my eyes allowed memories to flood my mind. How had we arrived to this day?

The Beginning

Chapter 2

Nestled among the farms in Southeastern Idaho, lay the small town of Ucon. The Snake River meandered along, nourishing the fertile grounds as a mother caring for her young. The early 1930s was a simpler time. Farming was a primary source of income. Joseph and Winnie McLing were newly married. They began their life together on a small rented farm. They were both descendants of pioneer families. They weren't involved with going to church, even though both of their mothers were regular church-goers.

Local members of the congregation encouraged them in fellowship of church participation so they could partake in the full blessings due them. For the next two years they devoted themselves to church attendance, while obeying the commandments with their

best efforts. In November of 1934, they made a trip to Logan, Utah. During the trip, Winnie started experiencing the movement of a baby in her womb. What a joyous experience to know another person was there depending on life from its mother.

The following spring Joseph planted crops. As May ended, Winnie gave birth to a baby daughter whom they named Jeanine. That was me. I had carrot-colored hair. I soon became the center of my parents' life. When I was three-and-a-half years old my brother Ray joined our family.

Farming was not an easy life. Horse drawn machinery was hard work. It was necessary for every member of the family to share the load. I learned to do my part at an early age. I loved day-dreaming. Early each morning the cows were taken to the canal bank where I would spend the lazy summer afternoons. I ensured the cows didn't stray into the road or a neighbor's field. I

loved to lie among the tall grass and watch the billowy white clouds.

I imagined the clouds were animals or people, and I would make up stories about their activities.¹¹ The sun soon kissed my fair skin with countless freckles. My dad affectionately called me his homely redhead. I was a sensitive child and took the remark literally. I was naturally self-conscious and eager to please.

The Great Depression was bottoming out, and farmers didn't have much money. My parents found their entertainment within church gatherings. Ray and myself looked forward to Sundays where we spent our time at one of our grandma's homes playing with cousins. My grandmothers were both great cooks.

I spent many hours following them around as they prepared meals. When

¹¹ Some of the stories that Jeanine created can be found towards the end of the book.

the dishes were cleaned and put away, the adults gathered in the living room. The men sat on the side of the room discussing farming and an occasional hunting or fishing trip. The women gathered around the kitchen table discussing their children. They gave one another advice and exchanged stories of their children's antics. Sleepy from active play, the children slept or quietly listened to the adults chatter. I loved to sit by my mother's chair hoping to hear a story about me.

One day the women were discussing how many children they were planning to have. My mother stated that two children were all she was planning. She informed the group I was Joseph's idea and Ray was a mistake. The remark cut deeply into my heart. I became convinced my mother didn't want me. I vowed to have many children and each would know they were loved and wanted.

Little did I know there were storm clouds brewing on our family's horizon. My father was away from home more and more. There were rumors of a pending war in Europe. When the United States became involved in World War II, the family became even more important, as uncles enlisted in the military. When dad reported for his army physical, they diagnosed him with a bad heart. He was classified as 4F. He grudgingly stayed behind as all of his friends and brothers-in-law joined the war effort.

My brother Ray and I delighted in the visits to grandma's. I had a great devotion for my grandmothers. They both had a way of making each child feel special. When I had self-doubts, one of my grandmothers would ease those feelings with hugs and smiles. I wanted to imitate both my grandmothers.

I began to learn the value of prayer. Grandma would kneel, express-

ing her gratitude to the Lord and petitioning Him for her family and neighbors. As she knelt to pray she would lovingly have me beside her. It didn't take long for me to realize these were special moments. I would recite my quick childish prayer while my grandmother prayed at length. I would become impatient and ask why it took so long for her to pray. She explained the gratitude she had, and told me of the many times her prayers had been answered.

One story that stands out in my mind concerned an event when my uncle Willard Horkley was coming home from a date on a foggy night. My childish eyes widened as grandmother Horkley told me of glancing at the clock, which read 12:05. Feeling impressed to pray for my uncle's safety, grandma slipped from the bed and petitioned the Lord to bring my uncle Willard home safely.

Willard, meanwhile, was traveling on a country road as quickly as the dense fog would allow. He glanced at his watch. It was 12:05. He was five minutes late. His parents had a firm rule about being home on time. The thought came into his head to stop the car. He ignored the thought the first time but the thought persisted. Willard kept telling himself if he stopped he would be much later. The thought became more insistent.

Finally my uncle stopped the car to see if there was something wrong, like a flat tire. As he reached the front of the car, he was astonished to find a small band of six horses in the middle of the road. The fog had made them almost invisible. Three more feet and he would've hit them. Grandma knew her prayers had been answered.

I listen to the stories with great interest. My faith in prayer and in the existence of a loving Heavenly Father was born. Grandma Horkley was a creative

woman. She was skilled at crocheting and made a number of articles for each member of her large family. I would sit on the footstool watching grandmother's fingers fly as she created an heirloom. When she would embroider I followed her every move. As she worked, she would explain all the steps. I soon mastered the technique.

As my parents drifted further apart, Ray and I spent more time with our grandparents. Grandmother Laura McLing served in the children's organization at church. She took Ray and myself with her. I would watch grandma talk to children. Her patience and kindness toward them was what I wanted to emulate.

Grandma McLing also enjoyed visiting neighbors. I loved to tag-a-long. The visit would often include mixing a large batch of bread. The bread came from the oven emitting a delicious aroma. Wrapped in a dish towel, the loaf

was taken along for the women grandma planned to visit.

A spare bedroom in grandma McLing's farm-house held treasures for my discovery. There were stacks of homemade quilt-tops waiting for the lucky person designated to receive one. I watched attentively as grandma carefully placed the colorful blocks together. Grandma explained that the stitches held the quilt together.

The quilt was worked on frames built by my father. I was an eager student and learned quickly from grandmother's instruction. I was quietly making my goals for the future. I wanted to be like these dedicated women. I wanted a large family. I wanted to preserve fruit, cook, bake, and sew just like both grandmothers were doing. I promised myself I would grow up to become the perfect mother. My grandmothers seemed to portray an example of perfect motherhood.

I attended first and second grade in Ucon, Idaho. My parent's marriage had deteriorated to the point where dad was rarely around. Mom moved to Idaho Falls. When dad was at home, the strain in their relationship became evident. I knew something was wrong but couldn't figure out what the trouble was.

Mom found a job and became a working mother. I soon discovered mom was unique. My friend's mothers didn't work. I found myself going to friend's homes to participate in the feeling of having a mother nearby after school. I hated being different and envied my friends. Their mothers would come to school in the middle of the day. I promised myself I would become a mother that didn't work outside the home.

Church activity became nonexistent in my parent's homes. Occasionally my mom would send us to the neighbors or my relatives. When I was about

11 years old, my parents divorced. I cried in my grandmother Horkley's arms for hours when I heard the news. Where did I belong now? I now had to deal with a new assault on my self-esteem. My friends teased me unmercifully because my daddy had left.

When my mom married again, my step-father tried to be a good father. He was a hard-working, steady man. He brought home a good living. Our family was finally enjoying some material things in life. The important thing was he made my mom happy, but they had no interest in church. I loved going to church. It reminded me of the good times spent at my grandmother's activities, but those days were seemingly over.

As a teenager, I began to develop fantasies of my own Prince Charming. My dreams included several children with a husband who made enough money so I could stay at home practicing the skills I learned growing up. I

wanted to be able to cook wonderful meals. I would be patient and love my children. I would go to church. I would no longer be alone. I would finally fit in.

About 20 miles south of Idaho Falls near the small town of Firth, Idaho, a young man was growing up. Deloy Nelson was a tall, slender, handsome fellow. His parents, Clarence and Eunice Nelson, owned their own farm and the entire family worked hard to make the operation a success.

Deloy too was growing up with dreams. Someday he would own a large farm and raise a big family. The Nelson family were descendants of Swedish immigrants. They moved to the pre-

dominantly LDS¹² community barely able to speak English. They retained the customs of the old country and associated as much as possible with other Swedish immigrants. The Swedish community distrusted the close knit LDS culture and felt alienated from it.

Deloy, his two brothers, and his two sisters worked hard with their par-

¹² This is an acronym for “Latter-day Saint” meaning, “Member(s) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” Sometimes people use the slang, “Mormons” because of these people’s conviction of the writings compiled by a man named Mormon. “LDS” and “Mormon” always refer to people and never to a church. It is always incorrect to say, “LDS Church” or “Mormon Church.”

It would be more accurate to say, “The church of the LDS people” or to say, “The church of the Mormons.” However, the correct title of the church is, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.” Its members are called “Latter-day Saints.” “Latter-day” means “Modern” or “Contemporary” and in no way reflects the phrase “Last-days” referred to in scripture.

ents on the family farm. He was a quiet and shy boy who didn't date much. Leisure hours were spent with his older brothers and several friends. He often drove to Idaho Falls to enjoy a movie, bowling, or some roller-skating.

In the summer of 1951, I actively pursued the teenage scene. I loved to roller-skate and would go three times a week with my friends. One night as my friends and I were line-skating, we spotted a group of boys entering the skating-rink door. One fellow I had met before, but I couldn't help noticing a tall dark boy standing next to him. His pleasant smile and the way his hair gently curled around his neck caught my attention.

His hair needed cutting and was slightly unruly. I skated to where the boys stood. My eyes meant Deloy's eyes when we were introduced. My heart skipped a beat. I began to tremble. Deloy smiled warmly. The boys said they were planning to go bowling, and

had stopped at the skating rink to check out if there was anyone there they wanted to take along. We chatted for several minutes.

I began to realize Deloy was interested in me like I was in him. The boys finally asked the young women if they would like to go bowling with them. The boys had an old woody station wagon with four bench seats. Ten of us piled inside. Deloy made sure we sat together. I had never been bowling before and was nervous. I didn't want to make a fool of myself. I confided my fears to Deloy. He smiled, took my hand, then told me he would teach me all I needed to know.

The evening flew by quickly. Everyone was having a great time. Talk flowed easy in the group. We paired off for a friendly competition. Deloy made sure we were together. I kept thinking I hadn't known a time when I had so much fun. When the game was over we

all piled in the station wagon once more. Deloy and I were together again.

The boys took the girls back to the skating rink where we had left our car. As I left the station wagon Deloy reached over and gave me a soft good night kiss. I thought my heart was going to leap from my body. I know I was beginning to feel something special. The summer became a whirlwind of dates. Deloy and I were together as often as our parents would allow.

Although I was still a teenager, we were talking about marriage. Deloy was in his twenties and wanted to settle down. I had one misgiving about Deloy: He was not a member of my church. My dream of a church marriage would not come true if I married him; even if he was a good person and treated me like a queen. There was no end to his kindness and consideration. I loved Deloy.

He didn't go to church, but had a strong Bible background from his grandfather who was a Swedish

preacher. Deloy was a hard worker. I knew he would take care of me financially. I finally decided my love for him was the most important thing. We were married early in 1952. My dream of becoming a mother coincided with Deloy's desire to be a father. We had many things in common. The only difference was our religious upbringing.

The following year after our marriage, I gave birth to our first son and we named him Christian. My dream of becoming a perfect mother had started. I soon discovered motherhood was not as easy as I had supposed. Babies need constant care. The baby didn't cooperate with my schedule. I often cried along with the baby. I had to learn to concentrate on motherhood. Feeding time was a special time. I started reading to my precious Chris as he nursed.

Deloy had dreamed of someday owning his own farm. He loved the land and enjoyed being outside working in the sun. He found employment working

for a farm west of Idaho Falls. The farm appeared well cared for. The farmer was a German immigrant who used many European ways of farming. Deloy enjoyed working for him and learned much.

I spent the next two years enjoying our baby son while practicing motherhood. Although we were all young, our love grew as the days went by. In the fall of 1954, I gave birth to our second son and named him David. Chris resembled myself while David was much like his father. I was happy. My dreams were coming true. I had two special boys.

I had missed my own mother when she went to work. I wanted to be at home with the children. Deloy worked hard to ensure I would have my wish. All my spare time was spent playing with my sons. Using the skills I learned from my grandparents, I created clothing, toys, and quilts for our family.

As the children grew I realized the need for us to have religious training. I felt something was lacking in my life. I hadn't gone to church since I had been married. I missed it. I had become lax about praying. One day I expressed my desire to go back to church. Our employers were active in the Lutheran Church and encouraged me in my desire for church activity, and said they would like Deloy and myself to attend the Lutheran Church.

The farmer didn't like other religions and wasn't eager to have someone of a different religion working for him. Deloy discussed this with me. I decided to let Chris attend the Lutheran Sunday School. Deloy and I also attended church occasionally. I missed my own faith's teachings. I began praying again.

One Sunday, Chris returned from Sunday School and excitedly shared some of the things he had learned. They weren't compatible with what I had

learned as a child. It bothered me. That night as I lay in bed, I expressed my concerns. Deloy wanted to make me happy. I could attend my own church if I desired. The next morning Deloy mentioned our decision. Deloy's boss became angry. He was serious about not wanting some other religion living on his place. Deloy went about his work all morning considering the dilemma.

As he washed up for lunch he explained the situation to me. I sadly looked up into his blue eyes. I told him his work came first, but Deloy couldn't bear the disappointment he saw in my face. Taking me in his arms, he told me there were other jobs. He would start looking. Within a couple of weeks he found employment north of Idaho Falls.

A stake president¹³ from my church hired him.

¹³ A stake president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints administers over several *Wards* and serves for about nine years. The administrator of a Ward is called a bishop. Wards contain about 500 people. Stakes have around 5000 people. Both the bishop and stake president are unpaid positions in the church and must make other arrangements for their income.

Accident

Chapter 3

The move to the new farm was an exciting day. I was eight months pregnant. It was a sunny day in February. The snow was beginning to melt. The roads were clearing except for an occasional slick spot. Our parents were helping us move to our new home. Our parents adored their two grandsons, and took every opportunity to spend time with our little family.

Deloy's father, Clarence, loaded his truck up with large appliances and started for the new house. I pulled onto the road behind him. My car was filled with small boxes. As I drove down the road I sang to myself. I was happy to be moving to a new home. I made future plans as I drove along.

I savored the opportunity to go to church again. The house we were moving to was almost new, and I had many

ideas on how to decorate it. My boys would have their own rooms. The new baby would soon be here. As I drove I thought about how I wanted a girl but I had a strong feeling I would have another boy.

I saw the tailgate of the truck in front of me open as the stove fell and careened down the road towards me. I slammed on the brakes and tried to swerve. The car hit an ice spot, spun around, then hit the stove with tremendous force. The stove disintegrated before my eyes. The car came to rest in a deep irrigation canal running along the side of the road. Fortunately, there was no water in the canal. I was shaking all over and began crying.

My father-in-law saw what happened in his rearview mirror. He quickly turned around and soon pulled me from the car. I was badly shaken. I kept saying repeatedly, "My baby. My baby," as I feared a miscarriage.

This incident would come back to memory many years later as I dealt with the many theories on homosexuality.

The following month in 1956, I gave birth to my third son. He was a beautiful baby. He had great big eyes with the longest eyelashes I had ever seen. His hair was long for a newborn. We decided to name him Douglas. I held him and examined his fingers and toes. Doug was a cuddly baby. I was not the least bit disappointed that he was not a girl.

His brothers took good care of him. Doug especially liked meal times when mommy had time to read while he nursed. I loved these times with my children. I loved reading to them. I dramatized the stories so they came to life.¹⁴ It was a special time for my children and myself alike.

I had gotten away from daily prayer in the early years of my marriage.

¹⁴ Examples of the stories Jeanine made up can be found towards the end of this book.

As I began raising my children I returned to dependence upon the Lord. The habit of prayer came back easily. I started and ended each day with a conversation with God whom I knew I loved. My prayers centered on our family, especially my husband and the boys. I would often pour out my feelings about religious differences.

We were now living around the people I grew up with. I started attending church regularly. I loved bringing my children to Primary.¹⁵ I was thrilled when my children came home with the same teachings I had in my own childhood. I accepted the calling to be a Primary teacher. I loved teaching. I felt as if I had come home. Deloy didn't go to church with me at first.

We had a special marriage and did everything together. One day while

¹⁵ Primary is the organization for children under 12 years of age dedicated to teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. Primary is similar to Sunday School.

we were eating dinner, Deloy expressed his feelings to me. I had been caught up in becoming active again and he felt left out. I suggested he join the church's baseball team. After some thoughtful deliberation, Deloy decided he would join the team. The men welcomed him with open arms, and he enjoyed their company.

He began to analyze his "anti-Mormon" feelings he had growing up. These men did not fit the stereotypes he had perceived "Mormons" to be. He liked them and wanted them as friends.

I would dress the children to go see the men play in the ball-field. Everyone cheered for their husbands as we visited to exchange women's talk. The children played together under the bleachers.

As the summer progressed, Deloy became more impressed with the men he worked and played with. I was getting ready for church one Sunday when Deloy announced he would like the LDS

missionaries¹⁶ to teach him about the church. I was thrilled. I contacted the bishop at church and told him the good news. The missionaries made an appointment for the coming week.

Deloy began to study in earnest. He had studied the *Bible* when he was young. Now he was starting to read *The Book of Mormon*.¹⁷ The missionaries came faithfully twice a week. They

¹⁶ That is “proselytizing missionaries.” The two broadest categories of missionaries are proselytizing missionaries and service missionaries. Missionaries are expected to cover all expenses in the performance of their duties and are not financially compensated in this church.

¹⁷ A book compiled by a man named Mormon who consolidated the histories of three different groups of people living around the Great Lakes area. The original writing was similar to that found in the Ojibwa culture. The record was then translated by Joseph Smith into English. It was later translated into other languages by different people. The work is considered divinely inspired by various groups of people.

taught the lessons. I listened intently. There were many gospel truths I had not known before. The day came when the missionaries challenged Deloy to baptism. I saw his face and was sure he was going to say, "No." He paused for a moment and said he would have to think about it.

After the missionaries left, I asked him why he was holding back. I gained an appreciation for the love and concern he had for his family, as he explained he was afraid his family would be hurt if he joined the church. This was a decision he would have to give much thought to.

Several days went by. I am not a patient person, and asked him again about his decision. He replied, he still didn't know. I reminded him of the missionaries' request that he pray about it. Deloy thought about it for a couple of more days. The only way he was going to decide about baptism was to pray about it.

Deloy was irrigating potatoes. The siphon tubes¹⁸ needed changing in the middle of the night. In the potato field under starlet sky Deloy fell on his knees and petitioned the Lord. Pouring out his concern for his family he asked if the gospel was true. A feeling of peace came over him as the realization came into his heart. The gospel was true. He knew in his heart his family loved him and he should be baptized. The decision had been made. Deloy was amazed at all the happiness he felt.

Deloy quickly changed the water on the potatoes and hurried home. The

¹⁸ Siphon tubes are long curved tubes used to irrigate rows of crops using ditch water. Long ago farmers used a shovel to cut slots in the sides of earthen irrigation ditches to allow water to flow to their crops. They had to close the hole to stop the water. This was labor-intensive and resulted in uneven watering across a field. Siphon tubes were a great improvement. Siphon tubes delivered a more even flow of water to the rows and were easily shut off by pulling out the siphon tube from the ditch.

hour was late. The children and I were sleeping soundly. Entering the house Deloy could hardly contain his feelings. Deloy got ready for bed. He couldn't contain himself any longer. He was excited and happy.

He had to share the news. Taking me in his arms he kissed my face saying, "Honey, I did it. I prayed about it. I'm going to be baptized."

At first I thought I was dreaming. I finally woke up enough to realize it was real. Deloy was holding me while telling me he was going to be baptized.

My excitement rose as I realized my dream of temple marriage¹⁹ was within my grasp. Tears streamed down my face. Deloy was interviewed to see if he understood the promises he was going to make at baptism. After the baptism, it would take a year before we could enter the temple. Special classes

¹⁹ Normally called a "Temple Sealing" where a covenant is made for eternal, or godly, relationships.

would be held to teach the sacredness of the special covenant promises we would make.

A new appreciation of the principles of repentance filled my heart. I believe with all my soul that adherence to the principles in the temple will ensure my family being together for eternity. The missionaries were called. The bishop was notified. I called my parents. Although they were not active in church they encouraged me to have my children blessed.²⁰ My mother expressed pleasure when I started attending church again. The older boys had been blessed in church by my uncle. Deloy had been present at the time.

Deloy and I then visited Deloy's parents. They loved Deloy's little family

²⁰ Not considered a baptism but a prayer during Sunday Services, which puts the child's name on church records as belonging to a certain family. A blessing is not considered an ordinance of salvation and is not a requirement of membership.

so much. The last thing we wanted to do was to hurt them. It took a while before Deloy got the courage to tell his parents of the decision he had made. We were sitting around the kitchen table with Deloy's parents. Eunice busied herself preparing coffee for the group.

Deloy spoke, "No coffee for us mom. We're not going to drink coffee anymore."

Eunice stopped in her tracks. Coffee was a tradition in their Swedish home. What was he saying to her?

He continued, "I have been taking missionary discussions about The Church²¹ and have decided to join it."

Eunice dropped the spoon she was holding, and left the room abruptly. No one spoke for several minutes.

Clarence cleared his throat, "Have you given this much thought?"

"Yes, dad, I have. This is what we both want. Please try to understand."

²¹ The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Clarence didn't respond immediately. He was thinking deeply.

Then he spoke softly, "You're old enough to make your own decisions."

Clarence then quickly changed the subject by asking Deloy about his crops. The rest of the evening was strained, but we knew Clarence had accepted Deloy's decision.

Arrangements for baptism were completed. The day came when I dressed my three boys in their best clothes. As I dressed them, I talked to them of the important event about to take place. I wanted my boys to understand how important this ordinance was and the wonderful promise ahead of us. The temple ordinances of sealing²² us together as a family for eternity was soon to be a reality. I took them to

²² The word "sealing" is taken from the wax seals embossed with the king's ring that reassures the receiver of a legitimate document. Later notaries used embossed seals to ensure a document was backed by the force of law.

watch their father enter the waters of baptism.

As the ordinance was completed my heart jumped for joy. The Sunday of Doug's blessing was the beginning of our activity in church. It was a special day indeed. For the first time in a long time I felt as if everything was perfect. Each Sunday I would dress my family, and we would attend church together.

It wasn't long before Deloy was called to work²³ in the scouting program.²⁴ I was happy. We were attending Temple Preparation classes. Deloy wanted to learn as much as possible about his new religion. As his knowledge grew, I also learned. There was much about my religion I didn't know. I

²³ "Called to work" is a phrase LDS people use to mean "asked to volunteer."

²⁴ The Church at the time was sponsoring a Boy Scouts of America troop. The local church leadership called on volunteers to fill leadership positions.

was beginning to develop a love for the scriptures I had not known before. Life could not have been more perfect. Our family was about to learn the real blessing of growth.

One morning in February Deloy left the house as usual to feed the cattle. He was gone for about an hour when I decided to send Chris to a neighbor's house to return some eggs I borrowed earlier in the week. I watched this four-year-old investigate each puddle along the way. Unable to break the ice, he began to slide across each one with the eggs in the small sack he held in one hand. I turned from the window and walked into the kitchen and started cleaning up from breakfast.

Within a few moments, Chris came running back through the door.

"Mama! Mama! Daddy is in trouble! Dad is drowning!"

Each day, Deloy had to break a hole in the ice on the river so the cattle could drink. Chris had an unreasonable

fear of this practice, and expressed concern each day for his father as he left the house. The river was too far away for Chris to hear any calls for help from that direction.

I questioned my young son: "What did you hear?"

"Daddy is yelling: 'help, help.' Daddy is drowning!"

I took his coat off and instructed him to watch his brothers. I left the house looking back to see two eager faces pressed to the window. I walked towards the feedlot. I had only gone a few yards when I heard a voice calling for help. Recognizing my husband's voice, I pinpointed the direction his voice was coming from. I began running as fast as I could towards the hay yard.

As I reached the baled haystacks, I called for Deloy. As he answered, I realized he was buried with hay bales. Summoning strength unknown to me before, I began lifting and throwing bales out of my way to get to where my

husband lay. When I finally uncovered him, I knew he was badly hurt. Blood was streaming from the side of his head, and one leg lay at an unnatural angle.

I knew I would have to go for help. I kissed Deloy, and quickly ran to a neighbor's home. My friend, Rita, was the only one at home. The ambulance was called. Rita ran to our house to watch over the three children. I returned to Deloy. Wrapping him in a blanket I held him in my arms until the ambulance arrived. He was taken to the hospital where he underwent surgery to fix his leg. About a week later, the doctor informed us the leg was not healing properly.

Surgery was needed again to insert a screw to hold the leg in its proper place. I returned home depressed. My mother met me at the door. We talked for a long while until I felt better. I was beginning to appreciate my mother's wisdom. It felt good to have my mother

close by to share my fears. Exhausted from the last several days, I knelt in prayer. I had a feeling things would be all right. Deloy would come home soon. He would heal.

I understood how important prayer was. My heart filled with gratitude for a grandmother who had taught me prayer in childhood. Prayer was to become my lifeline in the years to come. Deloy recovered from the surgeries completely, although it took several months. He was confined to a wheelchair at first, but soon learned to use crutches. He was cautioned to put absolutely no weight on his leg for six months.

March came in the spring for farm work to begin. Deloy wasn't able to do any of the work he had previously done. One day his employer came to the house to visit. As I answered the door, I had a feeling this wasn't one of his regular visits. His face was grim. As he sat twirling his hat through his fingers he

explained his problem. Unable to do all the work himself he desperately needed a farmhand.

He realized Deloy couldn't work for several months. My heart fell as I realized he was asking us to move. He needed the house so he could hire another man to take Deloy's place. He felt terrible about the situation, but knew of no other way to solve the problem. He expressed his gratitude for Deloy as he told him what a good worker he was, and how he hated losing him.

As he departed, he asked, "Deloy with your intelligence and ability, have you ever given any thought to applying at the National Lab?"²⁵

The Idaho National Laboratory paid good wages, and offered many opportunities for schooling and other

²⁵ In the early 1950s the government established a nuclear research laboratory in the desert near Arco, Idaho under the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). Later the AEC was renamed the Department of Energy (DOE).

good benefits. Deloy never thought of this before because he had dreamed of owning a farm. We pushed the idea aside until we found a place to live.

Deloy called his dad and explained the situation. Clarence had a small one bedroom home on his farm. He told Deloy the first thing we should do is move there. We would figure the rest out later. A few days after we moved, the bishop came to visit. He explained the Church Welfare Program²⁶ and filled out a grocery order and then an order for shoes for Chris and David.

Deloy's father Clarence had an old hand clutch tractor. Deloy soon discovered he could handle the tractor nicely in spite of his crutches. With the help of

²⁶ In April 1936, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints formally organized a welfare program to help its members suffering from the devastating effects of the Great Depression. Today, this welfare program has expanded to all corners of the globe and assists people of all faiths.

our families and the church, Deloy and I managed to support our family.

We talked about the possibility of employment at the INL.²⁷ I hated the thought of Deloy losing his dream of owning his own farm. He had worked hard and deserved his dream.

We were actively getting ready to attend the temple, and I had been called to serve in The Primary again. Deloy's injuries continue to mend. He was finally able to discard the crutches. As the time grew nearer for the temple sealing, I decided to tell my mother-in-law, Eunice, of the upcoming event. Eunice took the opportunity to tell me how hurt she was to have one of her sons leave their religion.

On August 29, 1959, our family drove to Idaho Falls and entered the Temple doors. Neither Deloy's family nor my family could be with us. My parents didn't come with us because they

²⁷ INL is an acronym for Idaho National Laboratory and is also called "The Site."

were not active members. As the temple session progressed I would frequently catch the eye of Deloy and would smile.

We entered the sealing room holding each other's hand. I couldn't hold back the tears. My dream was a reality. I felt I had made the best decision of my life when I married Deloy. As the officiator brought the three boys, all dressed in white, they looked like three angels.

We would never be separated as a family again. I promised myself I would teach these precious spirits about the gospel, and we would be together forever.

A few months later, I discovered I was pregnant. Things were not going well. My other pregnancies had been free of problems. Entering my fifth month, I went to a scheduled doctor's appointment. The doctor seemed unusually solemn as he completed the examination. He instructed me to get dressed and come to his office. As I en-

tered his office, I had a strong feeling something was terribly wrong.

He pointed to the chair, suggesting I should sit. I began to tremble. I could see my hands shaking as they lay in my lap. The doctor told me he couldn't detect movement or the heartbeat of the baby. I realized I hadn't felt movement either. I had wondered about it and thought I might be carrying a quiet baby. We talked about the situation for several minutes, then the doctor instructed me to go home.

If I had not delivered the fetus on my own by the end of the week, it would have to be taken surgically. The fetus was dead. I couldn't remember how I got home. Reality was just background noise. This was going to be my first child since our temple sealing. As I entered the house, I realized Deloy was still in the field. I couldn't muster the strength to walk. My mother-in-law, Eunice, still had the children at her own

home. I used the time to talk to the Lord.

I pleaded for the life of the child I was carrying. I felt my strength returning. Instead of going to Eunice's, I walked to the field where Deloy was working. He knew something was wrong as he saw me walking toward him. He stopped the tractor in the middle of the field. He held me as I sobbed out the story. He reassured me we would call the bishop immediately. There was no reason to panic until I lost the baby.

We walked back to his parents' home where he made a call to the bishop. The bishop came to our little home. With our three boys watching, Deloy and the bishop gave me a priesthood blessing. The blessing ended with a promise of a healthy baby. I felt a sense of comfort. I went to bed early, putting my faith in the Lord. Towards dawn, I was fully awakened.

Something was happening. I could feel the baby move! I lay there quietly for a few minutes almost afraid to accept what was going on. There it was again. There was a familiar movement: the flutter of a hand or foot within me. It was real. My baby was alive! I was experiencing a holy moment. We had not completely understood this miracle moment, except knowing everything was fine.

The next morning when the doctor's office opened I called with the good news. The doctor was skeptical, believing I was experiencing a hopeful delusion, but he made the appointment for me anyway. Deloy took the afternoon off to accompany me to the office. As the doctor examined me, he expressed amazement. The heartbeat was strong and the baby was moving. In the middle of 1958, Steven joined the family.

I continued teaching in Primary. I enjoyed working with the children. De-

loy was called to work with the scouts when his leg healed. I kept thinking life doesn't get much better than this. We had discussed the possibility of Deloy working at the INL. I hated the thought Deloy might not have his dream of his own farm. Many late nights we would discuss all of the ramifications. Deloy had, long ago, realized his dream was unrealistic. I had a hard time accepting it.

One night, Deloy explained to me the financial obstacles of farming. It was becoming more difficult for the family farm to make a living. We decided to pray one more time before making a decision.

He whispered in my ear, "It's time to make a new dream," as he drifted off to sleep.

A week later, Deloy submitted his application papers to the INL. It took a few months to get his security clearance, but soon he was making daily

trips to The Desert.²⁸ He enjoyed his work, and found he had a talent for mechanical work. The wages were good, and we were soon able to create a new dream.

²⁸ “The Desert” was another name for “The Site” or “The INL” because the location was in the middle of the desert.

Collateral Damage

Chapter 4

We started shopping for a home of our own. We looked for a place in the country where the boys could run free; a place where the boys could play in trees and play with pets; a place for a garden; a place for a milk cow.

Not long after Steven was born, a fifth son joined our family. Mike was born six weeks early, but was healthy and strong. At about the same time, we found our dream place in the small community of Goshen, five miles east of Firth, Idaho.

The house was nestled at the base of the foothills. Several homes surrounded the church. The lots were large. We had one-acre. The plan was to pay for the property, and build a larger home on top of the basement home already there. We moved in the month of February 1960. Within weeks of our

move I was called to the Primary Presidency. Deloy took over the Explorer²⁹ post.

At the time, the Family Home Evening³⁰ program was being encouraged strongly in the church. I grasped it with frenzy. I knew if I followed the success formula, I wouldn't have any problems with my children. The formula consisted of attending weekly church activities, daily family prayer, weekly Family Home Evening, daily family and personal scripture reading, obeying the commandments, and prayerfully following divine counsel.

²⁹ In the 1930s BSA established the Senior Scout program, which became the Explorer Program in 1949, and then the Exploring program in 1959. The focus generally included future career fields.

³⁰ Created by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on April 27, 1915, to encourage gospel study within the home one day out of the week; typically held on Monday nights.

Being a good organizer, I settled my family into the routine. Trying to pay for a home and meet the needs of five children quickly began to take a financial toll. As we struggled to pay the bills, I began to watch the women around me. Many of them had entered the job market. It was becoming more common to find mothers in the workforce. I began to reevaluate my decision to work.

Maybe not working was unrealistic like the dream of our farm had been. I finally decided to take a job. Deloy was reluctant.

“Honey, there must be another way. I know we can manage if we can figure out where to cut back.”

My temper flared as I screamed, “I’m tired of cramping.³¹ I’m going to do something. I’m going to work.”

Deloy knew there was no point in arguing with me. I had made up my

³¹ Living in a confined space under primitive conditions. A mix of the words “cramped” and “camping.”

mind. He didn't agree with me, but he knew I would learn for myself. I found a job in a drive-in theater working nights. I worked for about two months. It wasn't the most pleasant job in the world. I worried about the boys when I was away from them. Mike was nine months old and beginning to do all sorts of fun things babies do. I was missing many "firsts" in his life.

July 8 was a warm sunny day. Chris was now eight years old and fancied himself a businessman. He had received some all occasion cards and was eager to get out into the neighborhood to sell them. As we finished the morning chores, I finally consented to let him be on his way. David and Steven followed him out as he left.

Doug was his mother's helper. His greatest reward was to stay in the house and help me with whatever activity I was involved in. He loved to help cook and enjoyed playing with his baby brother. I sorted the clothes with Doug's

childish assistance. I started the washing machine, which was temporarily setup in our bedroom. The hose from the washer went through a wall into the shower stall where the water drained.

I couldn't help thinking how far away the dream of the house with a utility room seemed. The resentment I was feeling about the situation was growing as I glanced out of the window to see that David had climbed into the calf-pen and was playing with the calf.

Two year old Steven, true to his adventurous nature, was perched precariously on top of the rail of the fence stirring the water in the trough below with a stick.

I stormed up the stairs and called over my shoulder for Doug to watch the baby. As I approached, Steven knew he was in trouble and scrambled down the fence. David, realizing I was coming, quickly climbed out of the pen. David tried to help Steven down hoping his efforts would appease me.

In my anger I scolded them sharply. I then looked at the surrounding scene to determine whether the outside chores had been completed. I continued to take my frustration out on them when I found the calf and chickens had not been fed.

David tried to help me as I angrily completed the chores. As I emerged from the chicken coop, I heard a blood-curdling scream coming from the house. Scooping Steven up in my arms, I ran to the house, with David at my heels.

As I descended the stairs, I could hear Doug screaming, "Mama, Mama. Help me!"

The cries were coming from the bathroom. I rushed to the door. The scene that met me is shackled to my mind forever. Doug was standing by the shower stall holding his unconscious brother Mike.

Mike had crawled into the shower just as the washer started to drain. The

water heater had malfunctioned, with the heating elements staying on and the release valve frozen with lime. The water was boiling. Mike had been scolded with burns from the waist down.

I panicked! I had first-aid training working with the scouts, but the only thing I could think of was to get help. Wrapping Mike in a blanket, I ran to the neighbors. Without knocking, I ran into the door screaming for the keys to my neighbor's car. As my neighbor handed me the keys, she assured me the other boys would be taken care of. I drove like mad to the town of Shelley.

I stormed into the doctor's office, only to find he had gone to lunch. The nurse tried to calm me, and called someone to drive me to the hospital. When we arrived at the hospital, Mike was deep in a coma. The nurses helped me contact Deloy and my mother. Deloy's mother, Eunice, had already gone to Goshen to pick up the other boys. It

took Deloy almost two hours to drive in from work.

I paced the hospital corridor. Deep in my heart I knew I was losing my baby. What was taking Deloy so long? Finally, I saw him running to me. I rushed into his arms begging for forgiveness. If only I had been more patient with our temporary condition. If only I had not gone outside in anger. If only I had gone right back in after I removed Steven from the fence. If only I had not started the washer. If only I had confined the children by closing doors.

Deloy eventually figured out what was happening from my babbling. Deloy struggled for control. He had to be strong for me. If ever I needed him, I needed him now. We needed each other. My mother finally came with my brother Ray and his wife. I felt numb. I was becoming unaware of what was going on around me. I stared blankly as my mother and my brother tried to com-

fort me. The only thing I was keenly aware of was the arms holding me.

Three-hours ticked by. The doctor finally came out to explain the seriousness of the situation. If Mike lived he would never walk. He had lost all the skin from his waist down. I didn't react. It was just a bad dream. It was not happening. A haze gathered in my mind. The doctor tried several times to talk to me. I didn't hear what he said. An hour more passed. The door opened. The doctor came toward me. Deloy stood up and pulled me beside him. He knew what the doctor was going to say:

"I'm sorry, your baby is gone."

I sagged as Deloy forcibly held on.³²

The next several days were a blur. The only memory I have left is when Steven, my miracle baby, walked in the door at home. He sensed my need to hold him. I longed to hold my baby in my arms. Steve climbed on my lap, folding my arms in his arms. He stayed there for hours, sometimes drifting off to sleep. At other times he held me, his grief-stricken mother.

³² According to Kübler-Ross, the five stages of grief are: 1) Numbing denial of the loss. This can be manifested as keeping busy, or believing a mistake has been made. 2) Anger at yourself, others, or circumstances. 3) Bargaining by saying or thinking: "If... I will..." 4) Depression with the feeling of being isolated, foggy, heavy, confused, losing hope, or loss of coping. 5) Acceptance of the circumstance: This does not imply happiness about the situation. There is no limit to how long each stage will last. A stage may only take a moment or two or it may last years depending on the person.

I slowly became aware of the things around me. The bitterness was nothing like anything before. I wouldn't let the boys out of my sight. Deloy called the drive-in theater and told them I would not be returning to work. The guilt was tremendous, as I blamed myself. I knew one thing for sure: I would never leave my children for a job again.

During the funeral preparations, Deloy found it difficult to communicate with me. I had built a wall around myself. One evening as we were preparing for bed he tried to talk to me.

"Honey, how long since you prayed?" I looked at him with wonder.

"You expect me to pray after what I have done? I wasn't there when my baby needed me, now he's gone! The Lord isn't going to listen to me."

Deloy tried to hold me. I pushed him away.

"Honey, please. We've got to get past this. We have four other children who need you desperately. If you can't

pray, at least kneel with me. I'll pray for us both."

I wanted to say, "No!" But as I looked into his blue eyes, I knew he was hurting too. I would do it for him. He felt warm as he comforted me. I listened as he offered the sweetest prayer for our family.

I slipped into bed resting my head in the crook of his shoulder for the first time in days. That night as I slept, I had a vivid dream. I was walking in a shadowy place with billowing clouds floating around me.

As I walked I heard a gentle voice calling, "Mother, Mother."

Through the mist I saw a young man coming towards me. He looked a lot like Deloy had looked when I first met him. I was confused. I couldn't understand who it was. If it was Deloy, why did he say, "Mother" to me?

He spoke again saying, "Mother, don't you know me?"

"No. I don't know you," I replied.

He said, "My name is Michael."

I was amazed because this was a young man, not the baby I had lost.

He went on, "Mother, please don't grieve for me so. Please let me go. I have important work to do. I can't get on with it as long as you are holding onto me."

I walked on feeling a peace and sense of purpose. I let my son go about his heavenly work. I was beginning to heal.

Our family got through the funeral. It took a while before things returned to a normal routine. I poured all my energies into caring for the boys. Deloy watched me carefully. He was still concerned about whether I was fully accepting Mike's death. I became obsessed with having another baby. If I could only have another boy, my family would be complete again.

Within a couple of months, I was pregnant again. I secretly prayed for another boy. My pregnancy was going

well, and we poured our energies into the daily routine of life. The only rough spot was a major strike at the INL. Deloy got caught in a strike, and was without work for six months.

He managed to find two jobs, which gave us enough money to get by. That April, I woke up early in the morning. I was in labor. By the end of the day we had our sixth son. Mark was a big baby: Nine pounds! He had auburn hair.

I kept thinking as I nursed, "I have my five boys again."

Even as I was thinking these unrealistic thoughts, I was having nagging doubts that I would push from my mind. I clung to these thoughts for about two months.

One evening while putting the children to bed I repeatedly thought, "Six boys, not five. I have lost one."

I placed Mark in his crib and retired to bed. I lay there unable to sleep in the bed alone. Deloy was working a night-shift. I finally called for Chris to

come in and go to sleep with me. I held him closely, praying for the anxiety to leave me. After a couple of hours, I realized my son Mike was dead. Mark was not Mike. Mark couldn't take Mike's place. Mark had his own place in our family. There were six boys, not five.

As reality entered my mind, I began to cry. The crying became more intense. Chris woke and tried to comfort me. Chris woke David and the two of them tried everything they could to calm me. Chris finally called his grandpa Davis. About an hour later, my mother arrived. After exhausting all ideas to calm me, my mom decided to take me to the doctor. Eunice came to take the children while mom drove me to the doctor.

The doctor administered a shot and admitted me to the hospital. They performed several medical tests, and I was given anemic transfusions. I knew in my heart, however, my real condition was I had finally let go of built-up grief.

When I came home, I was ready to complete the healing and get on with my life.

Normalcy Returns

Chapter 5

When Mark was three-years old, we had our long-awaited dream house built. I wondered at times if the dream was worth the dust and dirt from the construction. I would stand outside for long periods of time watching the home take shape. Fall was in the air as I stood mentally decorating the house of my long-awaited dreams. It began to rain.

I woke up one morning to find water seeping into the basement. I called the contractor who covered the upstairs building with heavy black plastic. The boys laughed and giggled as they splashed in the pools of water in their basement home. They teased their mother as I tried to catch the drips in buckets and large pales.

“Someday you’ll think it’s funny, Mama,” Chris chuckled as he helped me with some pans.

“I doubt it,” only sent the boys into fits of giggles.

Nothing can make life more interesting than the daily antics of five boys. We built a treehouse in the large maple tree in the backyard. It provided the high ground when a good plum fight would develop with the boys next door. During one of the plum fights, Doug sought refuge in the tree branches. Trying to make an escape, Doug slipped and fell onto plum-tree barbs. Relying on his sense of humor, he informed me his ten stitches were the mark of Zorro.³³

The tree was a favorite place to hide from mom. The branches provided a seclusion from the world as the boys played their fantasy games or lost themselves in a good book. Chris and

³³ Zorro was a fictional creation of Johnston McCulley in 1919. Zorro is a masked vigilante in California who battles villains with a sword carving the letter “Z” into their skin and clothing.

Doug especially enjoyed reading. Often I would pretend I couldn't find them and let them stay in the world of branches and leaves.

The sandbox under the tree was a construction zone of roads, tunnels, and castles. It was a perfect place for countless cars and army men. The trees silently watched over the playing boys.

Five Boys in a Tree

*Five boys playing in a tree
None aware of what will be.
Wishing to hold the joy back then
My heart aches to once again
See five boys playing in a tree.*

I strongly believed in children learning to work. There were many chores to do. Milking the cow was my least favorite. Deloy's shift-work made it necessary for everyone in the family to learn the milking technique. Deloy called our family together and began his instruction. Chris and David readily

learned and thought it fun. Doug and I looked at each other apprehensively. Steven and Mark were as eager as the two oldest boys, but weren't big enough.

Disappointed, they whined. I hugged them as I was thinking of a way I could get out of milking this huge, filthy creature. I saw Doug had the same thought. The idea hit me that if I failed to produce milk from the cow, it would be Chris and David's task. I would offer my contribution by overseeing the boys get the job done. I slowly inched my way towards the cow. As careful as I was, I slipped on a pile of manure. The cow turned her head and seemed to smile.

I thought, "Even the cow doesn't want me to learn how to milk."

I had to find a way to get out of this. Deloy offered me a milking stool. I couldn't balance the thing! I looked up in Deloy's blue eyes, silently begging him to let me off the hook. He failed to

get the message as he began his instruction on how to hold and pull down on the cow's teat. I finally mustered up enough courage to proceed.

It would serve this man right if the cow stepped on his toes. I tugged on the cow's teat. No milk was rewarded for my effort. I tried again. Still no milk. Deloy took my hand gently. He showed me again exactly how to apply pressure at the right time in the right place. I tried again. No white stream found its way to the white pool in the bucket. Again and again I tried. My mischievous sons began to giggle. Again, I tried; still no milk.

Mark spoke: "Daddy, maybe Mommy's not big enough either."

After several more tries, I finally gave up.

Deloy turned his attention to teaching Doug. As he took a seat on the one legged stool, he silently prayed his luck would be as good as his mother's. On the third try, the warm milk streamed into the bucket. Many years later as we

reminisced about this occasion, I admitted I was glad I never had to milk the cow. I didn't have to go out on cold winter days, but it hurt my pride that I looked incompetent. Doug told me he had spent days trying to figure out how I failed to get milk after so many tries. He was convinced I had a gift.

Little League baseball soon came into town. All the boys in the area flocked to the school ball diamond to take part. Deloy and I loaded up the boys to sign us up for the new attraction. Chris, David, and Steven enjoyed the competition. We looked forward to the practices and the games. Doug found excuses to avoid playing. Deloy was becoming worried. As I drove him to work early one morning, he expressed his concerns. He couldn't understand why Doug wasn't enjoying playing ball.

Doug didn't seem interested in any sport. He wouldn't play touch football. He wouldn't touch a basketball

with a 10-foot pole. I noticed Doug's disinterest, but enjoyed having at least one child around who shared in my activities. We spent many hours together in the kitchen. He enthusiastically helped me around the house. The other boys were eager to be outside. Doug would hang around the house and spend his time doing things with me. I enjoyed his company.

We had long talks together. I had participated in dramatics in high school, and Doug was showing interest in that direction. I informed Deloy I thought he was being too hard on the boy. When Deloy returned from work one evening, he made a decision. Doug's only problem was that he wasn't skillful at sports. He felt uncomfortable on a big team.

Deloy had decided to form a team in Goshen. He would coach the team, and would give Doug some personal attention. Doug would soon overcome his lack of skill and learn to enjoy the game. The preparation for the new team was

completed. Chris, David, and Steven were thrilled. It was going to be neat to have their dad as their coach. The practices began. I watched as the troop marched across the street to the church's baseball diamond.

Doug brought up the rear. He was as delighted as if he were marching off to war. Deloy couldn't have been more patient with Doug's reluctance. No matter how hard Deloy tried, Doug simply did not want to play ball. Several weeks passed. Deloy asked me what I thought he ought to do. I told him to talk with Doug, and ask him outright why he didn't want to play.

It was a warm summer evening. Deloy had plenty to irrigate. It was a half-mile walk to the main headgate³⁴ where the water had to be turned down the ditch. As Deloy headed down the driveway, he motioned for Doug to accompany him. When they returned

³⁴ These are sometimes called *ditch gates*.

Doug was all smiles. He bound up the kitchen steps.

“Mama, Daddy said I don't have to play.”

Deloy was sober as he entered the back door and simply stated, “If a kid doesn't wanna play ball, I guess he shouldn't have to.”

The other boys continued to play. Doug was at their ball games cheering them on. Although I thoroughly enjoyed our five sons, I silently longed for a girl. Mark was five when I found out I was pregnant again. I prayed each day the baby would be a girl. At the time, I convinced myself another boy would be fine. In the middle of June 1966 I woke at 4:30 AM. I instinctively knew this was the day when a new baby would be ours.

I prepared to go to the hospital. Chris and David were excited and helped me with my suitcase. I filled their heads with instructions. Chris commented I was only going to be gone a

few days. I kissed Chris on the cheek and told him he would do just fine. David promised to do what Chris said. As we left the driveway the boys stood waving.

We entered the maternity ward and were assigned a labor room. Within a few minutes, the doctor arrived. After examining me, he announced it wouldn't be long. I was taken into the delivery room. Deloy kissed me as the gurney started down the hall. He retired to the waiting room with a book he had brought. In the delivery room things moved quickly. It wasn't long before the cry of a newborn was heard.

The doctor came around the delivery table holding the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. With tears pouring down my cheeks, I reach for my baby daughter. The nurse asked if she should go to the waiting room to notify the father. The baby and I were prepared to be taken to the maternity ward. I held

the baby close as the gurney was pushed down the hall.

Deloy quickly appeared at my side and said, "I was worried. I was afraid something had gone wrong."

"Everything couldn't be more right," I said as I handed him the baby. "Meet your daughter."

Deloy started to weep. He took the baby's hand in his own huge ones and touched her fingers. I settled in a room while they took the baby to the nursery. Deloy reached for the phone and called the boys. The boys finally had a sister. Doug was especially thrilled. When the baby came home, she was the focus of attention. Soon tiring of the work that comes with the new baby, the other boys drifted into other things. Doug continued to be mesmerized by her.

He was only 10 years old, yet fancied himself as her private guardian. I wondered for weeks if Wynette knew how to cry. Doug tried to anticipate her

every need. As I nursed my baby daughter, I ruminated on the enjoyable times I had shared with each boy in our family. The boys gathered around during the baby's feeding to listen as the books we loved were read and dramatized.

The BSA³⁵ program was an important part of our family. Deloy and myself both held positions in the scouting program. Each boy worked at their particular age level. Each Monday evening found our family involved with Family Home Evening. Many parents complained that their teenagers rebelled, but we all took turns giving the lessons. After the lesson was complete, another hour was spent working on scouting requirements.

The older boys helped their younger brothers work their way to becoming an Eagle Scout. I served for several years in the primary presidency.

³⁵ BSA is an acronym for the Boy Scout of America.

About the time our daughter Wynette was born, Church Headquarters in Salt Lake City instructed each church ward³⁶ should establish a Cub Scout pack. I was reluctant at first, being unable to see the value of the program in a rural community. The bishop and his counselors worked to organize a scout pack. They called Deloy to be a cub master and me to be a den leader.

Deloy took the challenge and got all the materials he could find about cub scouting. Doug and Steven were enthusiastic and spent all their spare time working on badges and enjoying activi-

³⁶ A unit of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints consisting of about 500 people. The *ward* referred to a political subdivision in the Midwest where LDS members resided. Church administrators, called *bishops*, were assigned responsibilities over specific political ward boundaries in these cities. Individual congregations were also defined by these boundaries. After moving to Utah, this same terminology was preserved in the establishment of LDS communities.

ties. Chris and David pitched in as den chiefs. Doug was one of the first in the ward to earn the Lion award.³⁷

Deloy was still concerned about Doug's dislike of sports, because Doug had to pass the swimming and lifesaving merit badges in the BSA program. The school's Parent-Teacher Association sponsored a swimming program each summer. Doug took to swimming like a fish. He progressed rapidly through the classes. Deloy was relieved. We finally found a sport that interested Doug. Each of our five boys became an Eagle Scout.

Our family enjoyed camping together. We took every opportunity to

³⁷ The Cub Scout "Lion" rank was dropped in 1967 and replaced by the Webelos program. The Webelos program is not the same as the Webelos Den created in 1954 but is often confused as such.

pack up the family station wagon³⁸ and head for the hills. The boys would all work on their scouting requirements with Deloy's guidance. Our big, white station wagon would wind its way around dusty mountain roads. Dust would rise in a cloud as we ventured farther into the beautiful tree-covered hills. We sang silly camp songs as the car moved along. Wynette sat on my lap trying to sing the words along with her brothers.

Deloy pulled the car into a shady and grassy campsite. As the car came to a stop, five excited boys spilled out of the doors eagerly gathering at the back of the station wagon. We un-

³⁸ A station wagon was a wagon that took people and luggage to the train station. The first motorized station wagons were built around 1910 by independent manufacturers using a Ford Model T chassis. They were called "Depot Hacks" because they were hackney's (now called taxis) that took people and luggage to the train depot.

loaded the gear and set up camp. I especially loved the campout. It gave me time to relax. I would gather up Wynette and a book or a crocheting project. With a blanket under one arm, I would head for a spot under a tree where I could watch my men create our temporary home.

Deloy had a rule: When camping, mom was not allowed to do any work. The boys needed to learn camping skills for their scouting. It gave them a good opportunity to wait on their mother for a change. As the camp took shape, Deloy handed out work assignments. He enjoyed teaching the boys new ideas. The meals were a work of culinary art. A chef would have envied the food the boys learn to cook over their glowing campfires. It was a treat to become the judge of their efforts. The boys would watch me carefully as I took the first taste. As I pronounce the verdict they would howl with pleasure.

Once in a while, I would find a dish that needed some work. Deloy made a mental note for the next camp-out menu. Cleanup was not as much fun as the preparation. A brotherly squabble would erupt over who cleaned up last time. Deloy quickly subdued the argument by announcing whose turn it was. The boys rarely argued with their dad. They were secure in his firmness.

The dishes were put away, and Deloy stoked up the fire. He and I would snuggle together on a log watching the flames. The children played around the campfire. Wynette joined her brothers squealing, as the boys would jump from behind bushes or trees trying to scare her. Their energy finally would wind down and they would join us around the fire.

Deloy or I would tell stories. As the boys grew older, they joined in the storytelling. The darkness began to fall, and the stars began to twinkle one more time. It was a contest to find the first

star to make a wish. Off in the distance, we could hear the night sounds of the forest: a screech owl or a coyote. The noise was music to each of us as we retired to our sleeping bags.

Wynette, afraid of the sounds, snuggled close. Deloy pulled his bag close, putting Wynette between us. We talked softly as the stars twinkled above.

I whispered, "Do you know what I would like someday? I'd like to build a cabin." I drifted off to sleep with a new dream.

These campouts were a vital part of our life. We moved from sleeping under the stars to sleeping in a camper. Although the methods changed, the love of the outdoors only grew stronger. My skill for homemaking grew. I took every class I could to make our house a real home. I found as the years passed, I did not have a flair for cooking.

Doug showed an interest in creating good meals. He loved inventing new

dishes and trying out new recipes. I encouraged him. He soon took over a major part of meal preparation. I spent hours at the sewing machine creating clothing. Doug could be counted on to spend his time playing with his sister. Doug and Wynette would play house with Barbie dolls for long periods of time.

His brothers teased him calling him a sissy. I chastised them and defended Doug. Doug cried as he explained to his mother that someone had to teach his sister how to be a girl. Holding him close I wiped away his tears. I assured him there was nothing wrong with playing with his sister. He was right, she did need someone to play with.

Now that he had his mother's support, Doug wanted to learn some of her motherly skills. I taught him how to crochet and to knit. One of his first projects was an ugly green dog. He spent hours knitting. The dog was only

ugly because of the yarn I had given him. Wynette loved the dog. Each night she would go to bed with the dog tucked under her arms.

Doug developed some new interests through scouting. BSA was a sponsor of a yearly public speaking contest. Doug's interest in drama was growing. He was an excellent student. He took great pride in his good grades. A public speaking contest was a good vehicle to present some of his views on the injustices of government. He hated the apathy of adults around him, and often wrote letters to the editor expressing his viewpoints.

He won prizes from many contests he entered and had several opportunities to meet with the governor. I caught a glimpse of the good mind Doug possessed. The whole family felt extreme pride in his talent. In drama he was convincing in his roles. As Helen

Keller³⁹ fought with him as a playmate in *The Miracle Worker*,⁴⁰ the whole family felt the urge to jump on stage to rescue him.

I would drive to our high school, accompanied by Wynette, to sit in the dark auditorium watching practices. One time when we slipped in, the drama coach was giving Doug instructions where he was going to be shot and die in the final scene of the play. I watched him as Doug listened intently. I reached for Wynette's hand as we made our way closer to the stage. We slipped into the seats as a scene began.

Within seconds Doug's sister was completely engrossed in the actions on the stage. As the scene progressed, the shot rang out and Doug fell to the stage

³⁹ A blind and deaf author, educator, and advocate for the deaf and blind.

⁴⁰ A play written in 1959, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1960. It was made into a motion picture in 1962, which won two Academy Awards.

floor speaking his last line. Wynette screamed and raced for the stage where her brother lay. Doug, hearing the commotion, recognized his sister's voice. She stopped when Doug jumped off the stage to pick her up. She burst into tears wrapping her arms tightly around his neck. I tried to explain that Doug was only pretending. It was only a play.

Wynette responded by saying, "He pretends good."

Doug loved to play the piano. I bought an old upright piano for \$200. Secretly, I wished I could play the piano. Daily happenings put a hold on that dream. I would have to accomplish my wish through my children. I insisted they all take lessons. Some of them enjoyed playing. Doug took to the music immediately. He would play for hours. Steven and Wynette enjoyed playing too. Doug was willing to help them with their lessons.

I was grateful for the help, because I couldn't tell one note from another. This was the year Doug grew taller, then taller. When he reached high school his 6'4" frame was the envy of the basketball coaches. No type of convincing could change his mind about sports. The last thing he wanted to do was play ball. However, Doug enjoyed dancing and went to all the dances he could. The girls began to notice him and he enjoyed their attention.

He had a broad smile, and was unusually sensitive towards the feelings of others. His big blue eyes and long eyelashes fit his handsome face. He would warmly greet the more timid girls. He didn't focus on any particular girl. I would fill with pride as parents expressed what a perfect gentleman he was. Jokingly, he would tell me he had to date all the girls so they all had an even chance.

Summers were hectic. Once school let out, the boys prepared to go

to camp. Each took their turn working with a camp staff. The boys loved the out-of-doors. Deloy and I could see them grow in leadership and develop character as each summer passed. Doug was good with the younger boys. He had a special talent for helping the underdog. Boys with problems blossomed under his patient guidance.

Chris attended and graduated from Ricks College,⁴¹ and then entered the Navy. A couple of years went by before Chris found the girl of his dreams. Rhonda was a special young lady with many of the same interests as me. A wedding was planned. Deloy and I took a vacation without the children to Oakland, California. We met Chris, and then proceeded home with him in tow.

⁴¹ Rick's College was formed in 1888 and grew to be the largest private two-year college in the United States. In 2001 it became a four-year institution and was renamed Brigham Young University-Idaho.

As we drove in the driveway, the front door burst open. Five children shot out to meet their oldest brother, Chris. Doug was sporting a large Band-Aid on his right thumb. He sheepishly explained how he had been teaching a whittling class at camp. At the end of the knife safety lecture, he closed the pocket-knife, catching his thumb between the blade and the handle. Five stitches later he claimed Zorro had struck again.

Doug graduated from high-school near the top of his class. His drama work had attracted the attention of the drama department at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. I picked up the mail one day and found a letter for Doug. I waited for him to return home. He excitedly tore open the envelope. He was being invited to come to Provo for an audition in the drama department.

Rushing to the phone, he called the drama coach. As Provo came into sight, excitement radiated through the

car as we discussed the piece Doug would use in the audition. We arrived at the college before lunchtime. We spent several minutes looking for the office we were to report to. The receptionist greeted us, and gave us directions to the cafeteria where lunch had been prepared. Doug could hardly eat.

After lunch, we went to the auditorium for the audition. Doug was amazed at all the equipment.

Taking my arm, he whispered, "Mom this is a big drama department. Are you sure I'm ready for this?"

Smiling and hugging him, I said he would do fine. I had complete faith in his abilities. The professor spotted us as we came towards the stage. He walked up the aisle to meet us.

Shaking Doug's hand warmly, he told him of the good reports of his work. Instructions were given to Doug, who took his place in the center of the stage. As he delivered his presentation, I watched the faces of the professors

over the drama department. It was only after a few moments that I realized they liked my son's work. As Doug finished, he started to leave the stage. The head professor stopped him and asked what musical number he was going to give.

No one said anything about a musical piece.

He turned to the professor and said, "I could play a piece on the piano."

"No, I would like to hear your singing voice."

We explained that we had not received the message for the singing audition, but if we could have a few moments, Doug could come up with something. The professor agreed.

Doug came down from the stage and said to me, "I don't know any songs. What am I going to sing? This is going to blow everything."

I quietly reassured him that they are not looking for a magnificent singing

voice. All they wanted to see is a voice that could be trained for musical work.

I slipped my arm around Doug's waist and said, "Calm down. You know you can do this. Pick a song you are familiar with. Pick a primary song, or a hymn; the simpler, the better."

Doug began searching his mind for a song. He finally smiled and declared he had a song. We approached the professor and told him Doug was ready. Doug walked to the center of the stage and sat down. Without the benefit of a piano accompaniment, he began to sing. His confidence had returned and the auditorium was filled with the sweetest rendition of *I Am a Child of God*.⁴²

As he sang the notes of the last verse, I glanced at the four professors. They were wiping their eyes as they ap-

⁴² This song was written by Naomi W. Randell (1908-2001) with music from Mildred T. Pettit (1895-1977). It was copyrighted in 1957.

plauded generously. He had his scholarship.

A Turn of Events

Chapter 6

After graduation from high school, Doug found a job working at the Safeway⁴³ store in Idaho Falls. He had to travel to Idaho Falls each day. DeJoy and I found it a challenge to juggle cars for everyone. David was going to college full-time at Idaho State University in Pocatello, about 40 miles away. He lived in a dorm, and would only come home on the weekends. It was a warm summer, and Doug enjoyed walking. He didn't mind taking the car to the bus parking lot and leaving it for his dad, while Doug hiked over a mile to Safeway.

One especially warm evening, I was attending a meeting at the church across the street from our home. I returned home to find Doug curled up in a

⁴³ A grocery store chain founded in 1915 in American Falls, Idaho.

ball and wrapped in a heavy quilt. As I entered the room, my first impression was that Doug was ill. I walked over to him, and instinctively reached out to feel his forehead. No fever. I could see he was trembling. His skin felt cold and clammy.

“What's wrong? Were you in an accident? What happened?”

Doug fell into my arms beginning to sob uncontrollably. I held him close trying to make sense of the words he babbled as he cried.

He finally calmed down a little to get out, “Mama, the most awful thing happened to me. I was walking to the store after leaving the car for dad. A car pulled up to the sidewalk. A man beckoned me from an unrolled window. I thought he wanted directions. As I stooped down he offered me money to do some terrible things.”

He began to sob again. I silently held him until he composed himself. He described what had been said.

“Mama, why would someone say those things to me?”

I was repulsed. I began to reassure my crying son. He seemed vulnerable. I was angry that someone had invaded his innocence like this. I explained to Doug about the sins of the world. We discussed homosexuality only briefly.

I couldn't offer much information on the subject because this was almost completely foreign to me. I assured him the incident was over and he could dismiss it from his mind. I was bothered by the incident that disturbed Doug. He had virtually gone into shock. He did not sleep that night. As the days passed, Doug recovered and I forgot about it. I never gave it a second thought until years later. Except for this one instance, it was a good summer.

Doug, at the time, was the oldest of our children at home. Deloy's shift-work kept him away many evenings. I used this time to enjoy Doug's compa-

ny. I knew once he went to college, the opportunities to visit with him would be scarce. My interests matched Doug's. We enjoy the same kinds of movies and plays. I was going to miss our quiet talks. The movie *Doctor Zhivago* was released early in the summer.

I picked Doug up from work, and we went to a favorite restaurant for a leisurely dinner discussing the events of the day. A breeze blew as we left the restaurant and headed for the theater. Doug told me the good reviews he had heard about the movie. As we watched the story unfold, we laughed in the same places and cried in the same places. We were like kindred spirits. I glanced at my son in the dark in the theater, thinking how I was going to miss him when he went away to college. We had become good friends over the years.

The movie ended and we each had the same thought, and Doug ex-

claimed, "Let's watch it again! Mom, didn't you love it?"

We called Steven and let him know we would be late, as we were watching the movie again. Before the summer was over, we had seen the movie five times, enjoying each time as much as we had the first. The song from the movie, *Laura's Theme*, became one of our favorites.

Doug bought the sheet music and played it on the piano until he perfected it. I got tired of hearing it. But now, whenever I hear it, I think fondly of Doug. Summer went by quickly, and the day came for Doug to move to Provo. I rose early Friday morning to get the children ready for school. I had many things to do before Deloy got home from work at ten in the morning.

I prepared a list of instructions for Steven. Last-minute details for Wynette and Mark were discussed, with a special warning about not driving the car anywhere unauthorized. There was no

problem getting Doug up and going. He was excited about going to college. He pitched in helping me with the household chores. Deloy arrived on schedule and we headed for Provo.

It seemed the trip took much less time than usual, but Doug complained it was taking forever. He talked in a steady stream unable to contain the excitement he felt. We had two sons already leave home, but this was going to be especially hard. Doug and I had a special relationship. I understood Doug. We arrived in Provo and went straight to the dormitory. We got Doug's belongings settled, and then decided to go to lunch.

Deloy found a motel for the night; Doug spent most of the afternoon job-hunting. That night we went to a movie. The next day Deloy and I left for home. I waved to my son for as long as I could see him. Why did I feel nervous about Doug's new adventure? I imagined it

was just being a mom. I told myself everything would be alright.

The next few weeks alleviated my fears. Doug plunged into college like everything else he had done in his life, with enthusiasm and dedication. Each week a letter would come filled with all the details of his daily life. He was enjoying his new experience. The first “grade report” was wonderful, and I began to relax.

About two months after the semester started, Doug made his first call home. As I answered the phone, he said in a sad voice, “Mama, I hope you don't mind the long distance call. I've got something to tell you. I don't want to tell you in a letter.”

I didn't speak for several seconds. “Son, are you alright?”

He burst into laughter, “Of course I'm alright. In fact, I'm great! Are you sitting down? You need to sit down for this one, Mom. Are you ready?”

I replied, "I'm ready, I'm ready!
What in the world is it?"

"Are you sure you're ready,
Mom?"

"Douglas!"

He laughed again, "Mom, I have
the lead role in the next BYU produc-
tion."

I screamed! I pulled out the details
from him as he continued to tease me.
As the conversation came to a close, he
made me promise not to tell his dad. He
wanted to tell him. The news spread
through our family. Plans were made for
everyone to attend the performance.

The day finally came when we all
piled into the car and went to Provo.
The play was good. I thought my chest
would explode with pride. Doug deliv-
ered his lines with perfection. Deloy
commented on the strength of his
voice, and how convincing he was in
the role. As the play ended, the kids ran
backstage to embrace their brother,

smothering him with compliments and hugs.

After the play, things started going wrong. The first indication was when Doug called and said he would like to come home for the weekend. He said he was a little homesick, so we went down and picked him up.

When the time came to leave BYU for home, I asked Doug about his mission plans. He told me he would talk to the bishop the next time he came home. Doug's next letter was filled with his mission plans and his activities in the drama department. In 1974 he attended a devotional where President

Spencer W. Kimball⁴⁴ spoke. Doug was filled with the spirit, and conveyed his feelings in a letter. I picked up the mail and excitedly opened it. I scanned the letter. I then studied it in its entirety. Doug had a special experience. “The prophet said, ‘Environment is not our limit. Circumstance is not our ruler. Walls are not our prison.’” I reviewed the letter several times and shared it with our family.

The phone rang, and Steven picked up the receiver.

I heard him say, “Hey man, what's it like to see a prophet?”

⁴⁴ Spencer W. Kimball was the president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1973 until his death in 1985. The devotional was given on September 17, 1974. President Kimball talked about weighing commitments carefully before pledging to do them. “Don't pledge, then not do.” He warned, “You can determine your actions, but you must live with the results.”

When I talked to Doug, he shared the experience and told me how eager he was to go on a mission.

A few weeks later, Doug found a ride home for the weekend. Our family was excited to have him home for a few days. After the initial excitement of having him home, I noticed he seemed pre-occupied. I dismissed it and believed he was worried about his finals. I woke up on Saturday and wanted to finish some Christmas shopping. I busied myself with making breakfast.

Doug got up, and came straight to the kitchen. Pouring himself a glass of orange juice, he asked me what my plans for the day were. When I asked if he would like to go with me, he said, "Could we go alone? I would like to spend some time with you."

As we left the house I handed him the car keys. He shook his head and asked if I would drive. How unusual. A sliver of worry passed through my mind. Something was troubling him.

For several miles, Doug was quiet. He finally spoke.

“Mom, I need to talk to you.”

I tried to joke and said, “Talk already. Have you ever lacked for a loss of words?”

“Mom, it's serious,” he said.

I apologized, then encouraged him to tell me what the trouble was. It took several minutes before he spoke again. He was sadly slouching down in the passenger seat. What could be troubling him?

Finally, he seemed to muster the courage to speak again.

“Mom, I don't know how to talk to you about this. It's hard. It's hard.”

“Come on Doug. We've been able to talk about anything before. Tell me. Are you in some trouble?”

“No, no. It's nothing like that. It's about things going on at college.”

“Like what?”

“You're not going to like it.”

“Son, why don't you tell me. We'll work out the details later.”

He took a breath. I could feel the fear creep through his body.

“There's something serious about the people in the BYU drama department. Mom, homosexuality is down there.”

I blasted, “Are you involved? You know what a terrible sin it is.”

His demeanor changed and said, “No. Mom, you know I haven't been involved in anything like that. I wanted you to know what was going on.”

He straightened in his seat and changed the subject. I was surprised at how upset he had seemed over such a trivial revelation.

I wondered if there was more to the story. The rest of the day was uneventful. Doug talked about new friends he had made, his classes, and casually mentioned he had been seeing a girl named Jill. The weekend ended, and Doug returned to school. I thought of

the strange conversation several times during the week, but pushed it out of my mind with my activities.

Christmas time came and went. The first week in February, Doug called to say he was coming home with a friend from Pocatello. Ben had his own car and was coming home for the weekend and offered Doug a ride. Doug jokingly told me, his dear family deserved the blessing of his presence. I was eager to see him.

David had already graduated from college, and was employed in Idaho Falls and made arrangements to pick Doug up from Pocatello. It was a fun weekend. Doug flirted unmercifully with David's girlfriend. Sensing he was starting to make David angry, I pulled Doug aside and made him promise he would stop the teasing.

Deloy was working through the weekend, so David and I drove Doug back to Pocatello late Sunday afternoon. We pulled up to the front of Ben's

home. Spring was trying to peek through. The sun was shining warmly and the snow was rapidly melting. Patches of grass showed through the remaining snow.

Doug climbed from the car. "I'll run in to see if Ben's ready to go."

The door opened as Doug got about halfway up the sidewalk. A tall, good-looking, dark-haired young man emerged from the house. He descended the steps to meet Doug. They talked as they approached the car where David and I waited.

Doug stuck his head in my window.

"Mom, David, this is Ben. Ben, my mom and brother."

"Hi," said Ben. "Good to meet you Mrs. Nelson." Ben then acknowledged David with a slight salute.

"Mom, Ben's not ready. I will take my suitcase and let you go."

I kissed Doug on the cheek before we pulled the car away from the curb.

The two boys stood on the sidewalk watching the car pull away.

Doug waved and I waved back. The car traveled several blocks before either David or I said anything. David broke the silence.

“Mom, What do you know about this Ben?”

I thought it was a strange question. “Not much. He's involved in the drama department. Doug hasn't said much about him. Didn't you like him?”

David frowned. “He seemed OK. I got some vibes, that's all.”

“What vibes?” I was starting to worry.

“Something's not right.” David chose his words carefully before he went on. “Mom, Now don't panic. I got the impression Ben is gay.”

I recoiled. “David, you can't know by looking at him. Why do you say that?”

“There's something about him that's not like normal men.”

I didn't want to discuss it anymore. I quickly changed the subject. David didn't pursue it any further.

Before school let out in the spring, Doug came home again. He had talked to the bishop some months earlier. The bishop had set up Doug's ordination to the Melchizedek⁴⁵ priesthood soon after his birthday in March. He arrived home and seemed withdrawn. I had the feeling he wasn't excited about the ordination. I asked him if he still wanted to go on a mission. I sensed something was wrong. During the weekend, I asked Doug several times if things were okay.

⁴⁵ Sometimes spelled as "Melchisedech." Melchizedek means "My King Is Righteousness." Melchizedek was the king and priest of Jerusalem who Abraham paid tithes to. The Melchizedek Priesthood holders of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have additional responsibilities placed on them to give special blessings and ordinances to others.

He replied in the affirmative. For some reason, I did not believe him.

Deloy and I took him back to Provo on Monday. The trip was a quiet one. Doug didn't have much to say. On the trip home, I expressed my concern to Deloy. He cautioned me about "borrowing trouble." Doug was probably nervous about leaving on a mission. It was a big decision and had to be scary. Deloy was convinced he would be fine once he had his papers⁴⁶ submitted. A couple of weeks passed by before we heard from Doug again. The phone call came in the middle of the afternoon.

I was hanging laundry outside in the spring sunshine when I heard the phone ring. I ran into the house and picked up the receiver.

"Hello. Mama?" Doug's voice sounded funny. My heart skipped a beat.

"Doug, Are you all right?"

⁴⁶ An official application to serve a full-time mission.

“I’m fine. I wanted to talk.” There was silence.

“Anything special? Or, are you homesick?”

He began to cry.

“Mama, something awful has happened.”

“What? Are you sure you are all right?”

He struggled to get his composure.

“Mama, Do you remember Ben?”

“Yes,” I said. “He’s your friend from Pocatello. Has something happened to him?”

“No, I need to tell you something about him.”

I listened for several seconds before my son began to speak again.

“Mom, I went over to Ben’s apartment last night, and decided to spend the night.” He hesitated. “Ben had another friend over too. I slept on the couch. His friend slept in the bedroom. I woke up in the middle of the

night.” He began to cry again. “Mama, Ben’s gay.”

Had I heard right?

I reacted vehemently. “Doug, you get yourself away from him. I don't want you to ever have anything to do with him ever again. Do you hear me? Are you listening?”

“Yes, I heard you.” He was still crying. I sounded angry.

“Mama, please understand. Don't be mad. Please understand.” When he didn't hear me speak again, he quietly spoke, “Yes mama, I hear you. Don't worry. I won't have any more to do with Ben. Mama, I love you. I need to go now. Talk to you later. Okay?”

I stared at the phone for a long time. What was my son involved in? Thoughts ran through my mind: “Was Doug gay? No! Impossible!” After the house got quiet, Deloy and I talked about Doug’s phone call. We decided it was nothing to panic over. Doug was

going to be fine. As soon as he got his mission call,⁴⁷ he would be fine.

But in the back of my mind, I knew there was something terribly wrong. I didn't know how to deal with it. My upbringing did not give me any background to deal with something like this.

⁴⁷ An official document detailing where the person is called to labor as a missionary, what location they are to report to, and when they are to report.

Doug's Fiancé

Chapter 7

Spring break was coming, and Doug asked if he could bring a girl home to meet the family. Relief flooded over me as I enthusiastically gave my consent. I planned a good meal and cleaned the house until it was spotless. There was nothing to worry about. He had a girlfriend. How could I have been so silly? The couple arrived. I welcomed them as they came in the front door.

Jill was a delightful young woman. She was tall, but shorter than Doug. She had slightly curled brown hair that hung shoulder length. She had hazel eyes that sparkled in conjunction with her broad smile. I was impressed. Jill showed no hesitation in becoming acquainted with the other members of our family.

As I prepared for the meal, Jill joined me in the kitchen. We worked

well together. After dinner, she and Doug washed up the dishes. Deloy and I listened to their cheerful chatter and laughter as they completed the chore. Deloy and I smiled at each other. He also approved. After the dishes were finished, we retired to the living room. Steven and Mark were stunned by Jill's beauty and charm. The evening turned late, and the younger children headed for bed.

When the four of us were finally alone, Doug's face took on a serious tone.

"Mom, Dad, Jill and I have something to tell you."

I glanced at Deloy unsure of what was to follow.

Doug continued, "Jill's roommate, Lori had a baby."

Jill dug in her purse and produced a picture of herself and Doug holding an adorable baby girl.

Doug took a deep breath and went on, "Lori's parents don't know and

she doesn't want them to know. Jill and I have been thinking we might get married and adopt the baby."

I was lost for words.

Deloy started with, "What about your mission? Don't you think this is rather sudden?"

I interrupted, "Doug, marriage is a big step. You need more of a reason than wanting to adopt a baby. How long have you and Jill known each other? How do you feel about each other? What do her parents think about this?" The questions tumbled over one another as I tried to comprehend what my son was proposing. The old familiar smile filled his face as he calmly answered each question.

The talk finally wound down and Deloy and I went to bed. I could hear Doug and Jill in the living room talking into the night. Sleep finally came. As I drifted off into a deep slumber, I thought how grateful I was that my son was not gay. He couldn't be gay if they were

considering marriage. Jill was a lovely girl. It was a strange mix of sadness to know Doug dismissed his mission plans, but I was happy that he wasn't gay. I drifted off to sleep, believing in my son's decision. The next two days our family enjoyed the young couple. We happily gave them support for their future plans of marriage as we left to return to Provo.

I was surprised when several weeks went by before I heard from Doug again. He called one evening announcing Jill and he had broken up. He was defensive and wouldn't talk long. Deloy encouraged me to give him some space. We decided the break-up had been hard on him and he would come around once he's dealt with it. I would give him some time.

A few days later we received Doug's grades. They were terrible. He was flunking almost every class. I went straight to the phone and called Doug's dorm. His roommate answered. I de-

manded to speak to Doug. Jeff hesitated and gave an excuse. I was angry and demanded again to speak to Doug. Jeff didn't appreciate the way I was speaking to him.

"Mrs. Nelson, Doug isn't here. I haven't seen him for weeks. I don't know where he's staying, but he isn't here." With that he hung up.

I started to cry uncontrollably. Where in the world was my son? What was going on? I cried for a long time. I began to make some more phone calls. No one seemed to know where Doug was. I had to find my son. I called Deloy at work. He suggested I call Chris and David. The boys reassured me while we waited for Deloy to get home. When Deloy arrived home, he made more phone calls with no luck. The decision was made that he and the two boys would go to Provo to try to find Doug.

I stayed at home on the chance Doug might call. The trip to Provo seemed endless. Deloy imagined all the

terrible things that might have happened to Doug. How could this boy put his family through this experience? After a couple of hours in Provo, they finally tracked Doug down. A girl named Lynn Ann had invited Doug to stay with her. Deloy couldn't remember ever having the feelings he was experiencing as he pulled the car up in front of the apartment.

Chris, David, and Deloy knocked on the door. It seemed like an eternity before Lynn Ann opened the door.

Deloy asked, "Is Doug Nelson here?"

"Who are you?"

"I'm his father. Please, I'd like to speak with him."

She stood in the doorway for several minutes. Finally, over her shoulder, they heard Doug's voice, "It's okay, Lynn Ann. I'll talk with them."

Deloy felt relief as he recognized his son.

The first few moments were awkward. Deloy finally persuaded Doug to accompany them to a restaurant. Over dinner they tried to persuade Doug to come home with them. He refused.

Deloy kept thinking, "Who is this stranger? Is this the son I've known for 19 years?"

Chris and David tried hard to persuade him to come home. He remained adamant. He wasn't going to come home. He was staying in Provo, but was not going back to school.

Deloy asked him about Ben. Doug replied he had removed Ben out of his life, and that he was old enough to make his own decision and live his own life. Realizing there was no change in Doug's mind, Deloy got up from the table and walked to the cashier to pay. He beckoned to the boys, and they walked silently to the parked car. They all drove back to Lynn Ann's place. As Doug left the car, Deloy told him to call if he needed anything.

The drive home was even longer than the drive down to Provo had been. Hardly a word was spoken.

Deloy took Chris home, then said, "Thanks son. We did our best."

When Deloy and David got home, David hugged his dad and went to his room. I was wide awake when Deloy climbed into bed.

I knew by the sounds when they entered the house, Doug was not with them. I quietly wept as Deloy related what happened. I had a feeling of complete helplessness. What had gone wrong? What had happened to the son I had known so well? Would he ever come home again? What if Doug hated us?

In Provo, Doug entered the house and went straight to the bedroom Lynn Ann had given him. Lynn Ann followed him, asking him what happened. Without answering, Doug slammed the bedroom door. Lynn Ann stood outside for several minutes, pleading with him to

talk to her. Inside Doug didn't even turn on the light. He threw himself down on the bed and began to cry.

Why did he seemingly have no control over the feelings he was experiencing? He had tried everything he could, but the feelings were still there. He had gone to the bishop of his college ward who suggested counseling. He had tried several sessions. Shock treatments were advised.

The thought of shock treatments⁴⁸ scared him terribly. He knew he could not submit to that. He began to pray feverishly. Surely, the Lord would give him some assurance. Hours passed as he finally drifted off to sleep seeking answers.

⁴⁸ Electroconvulsive therapy, or electroshock therapy, was introduced in Rome in 1938 by U. Cerletti and L. Bini. Electric shock therapy sends electric currents through the brain causing a seizure that alters brain chemistry. Electric shock therapy can result in memory loss as well as debilitating long-term confusion.

Over the next few days Doug existed as if in a dream. He woke in the morning, rarely ate, worked, thought, prayed, and practiced trying to overcome his feelings. At nights, he fell into bed exhausted, no closer to a solution than he had been the day before. Several times he had thoughts of suicide. Doug called home and asked if I would send him some money.

I told him, "We're not about to send you money. You have to support yourself. We don't like the way you're living and don't think we should have to support it."

Tears filled his eyes as he replaced the receiver. He was on his own. His parents were right. He needed to get a better job. What had happened to his life? As he wiped away the tears, he longed to be part of a family. He wanted so much to be able to talk to me about his feelings. We had been able to talk about everything. Now I wouldn't listen.

Now I was attacking him. What had happened?

The next morning Doug arose early. He showered, then dressed. As he looked in the mirror, he made himself a promise. Today he was going to find a good job, and he was going to learn to accept himself. There must be some way to resolve the feelings he had. The job hunting went well.

He found a job at a pizza parlor that paid better and offered more hours of employment. Lynn Ann had introduced Doug to the Pearsen family who she babysat for. Gerry and Karen Pearsen were easy to talk to. They had a special rapport with young people and their home was a popular gathering place for many college students.

Doug spent more time with the Pearsen family. Doug loved playing with their small children. As the weeks passed, Doug became comfortable with discussing his homosexual feelings with Karen. Much to his surprise, he found

she understood. She confided in Doug that Gerry was gay. They were trying hard to work through Gerry's feelings to save their marriage.

Doug was beginning to realize he was not alone. There were many young Latter-day Saints⁴⁹ like himself, who were trying to reconcile their church teachings with their gay tendencies. One young man who frequented the Pearsen home was Chase Wilkes. Doug began a friendship with him. Doug began to regain his self-confidence. He decided to call me. Upon hearing his voice, I was relieved by his enthusiasm as he talked about his job. We talked for a long time. It was like old times.

My bad feelings of the past weeks were forgotten that day. Doug felt an old comfort return as he talked. He decided to tell me about Chase. Although he didn't muster the courage to tell me

⁴⁹ This refers to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints often referred to as simply *LDS*.

about his gay feelings, he could tell me about his new friends. He tried to explain how attached they were.

“Mom, his name is Chase Wilkes. He's a great guy.” His voice became more solemn. “Mom, it's good to have such a close friend. When he touches my hand, we both know we can depend on each other.”

I felt a chill go through my body, but I was still denying there was anything wrong.

I said, “That didn't sound right,” hoping for clarification. The conversation abruptly ended.

Doug felt saddened as he hung up thinking, “I guess she still doesn't understand.”

On my end of the line, I was experiencing a fear like I had never known before.

Deloy had purchased a small motorhome. His vacation was coming up, and he wanted to take a trip to try out the new camper. I told him of my con-

versation with Doug. One evening as our family finished dinner, Deloy introduced a plan for the next several days.

“Why not take the children down to Provo, pick up Doug, and take a trip to southern Utah?”

He assured me that Doug was fine. Maybe we could even persuade him to move back home.

Deloy was sure the worst was over. The children were excited. We would all love a camping trip. I had not been feeling well, and experienced problems with my stomach. The doctor had failed to find anything wrong, and was sure it was stress. If we could persuade Doug to come home, maybe I would recover. Steven and Mark were excited as we packed the motorhome.

Friday morning we headed for Provo. The children played games at the table, while Deloy and I talked quietly in the front seat. I had a terrible feeling of apprehension. What if Doug refused to talk to us? What if the trip

made matters worse? Deloy tried to calm my fears. He teased me about “borrowing trouble.”

We arrived in Provo, and headed for the pizza parlor where Doug worked. Doug was excited to see us. He scooped up Wynette, swinging her around. It was evident Doug missed us as much as we missed him. He still had a couple of hours to complete his shift.

I decided this was a good opportunity to do some shopping at the mall. Five o'clock came and we returned to the pizza parlor. Doug was waiting. I immediately brought up the subject of the trip to southern Utah. I asked Doug to come with us. He declined, saying he couldn't get off work. He did, however, want to spend time with his family. After a short discussion, we decided to spend the next few days in Provo. Doug seemed excited and began making plans of things we could do.

The decision was made to camp in a campground outside of Provo. After

camp was set up, Doug left us and promised to see us first thing in the morning. The next morning as I was finishing the breakfast cleanup, Doug appeared. With him was a young man and an older fellow. Doug introduced them as Chase and his father, Colin.

I became cold towards them when I realized who the young man was. I found I was blaming him for all the problems we were having with Doug. I didn't say anything, but Deloy could see the coldness in my eyes. The group talked a few minutes, then Doug suggested he, his brothers, and Chase go on a hike. Wynette pleaded with Doug to take her along.

I felt awkward. I was finding it difficult to have a conversation with Colin. Colin, sensing my uneasiness, invited us to sit with him. It was evident that Colin had something he wanted to discuss.

“What are your feelings about the boys?”

Deloy responded, "What do you mean?"

Colin answered, "I was wondering what Doug has told you about their relationship."

I answered, "We haven't been getting along with Doug lately. He hasn't told us much of anything."

I could feel myself getting defensive. Colin sensed it too.

"When Chase and Doug told us you were here, I wanted to come talk to you. Doug is a fine young man, but I have some concerns about them."

I reached for Deloy's hands.
"What are your concerns?"

"I don't know of an easy way to say this, so I will just say it: I believe our sons are gay."

I recoiled. I heard Deloy catch his breath. I could see the anger in Deloy's eyes as he spoke, "What do you base your judgment on?"

I could see the sadness in Colin's face. He was not trying to be unkind, af-

ter all his son was involved too. We talked for about an hour. Colin explained why he felt the way he did, but could offer no solutions about what to do. The kids returned from their hike.

Wynette had picked flowers, and they needed a glass of water to sit in. Doug could tell his parents were upset. Colin and Chase prepared to leave. Colin reached out and touched my arm, "Why don't you and your family come to dinner tomorrow? We would love to have you. I would like you to meet my wife, Quinn."

I wanted to decline.

Doug interrupted, "Please mom, won't you come? Please. Chase's mom is a great cook. Come on. Please."

I glanced at Deloy. He responded, "Sure Colin, we would enjoy that."

Colin smiled and said, "See you tomorrow then."

He then shook hands with Deloy. I stepped into the camper. My mind was twirling. I wanted to scream.

My first instinct was to confront Doug, but I couldn't do it in front of the younger children. Doug could tell by my attitude that I was angry.

Doug thought to himself, "Colin must have told my parents about Chase and our relationship." Doug felt angry, because, "It wasn't Colin's place to tell my parents." At the same time, Doug felt relieved. If we found out, it might make it easier for Doug to talk with us.

We made plans to attend a play at an outdoor theater. Chase was performing in the play *Man from La Mancha*. When the evening ended, Doug decided to go home with Chase, instead of staying at the campground. Chase gave De-loy the directions to his home and they left. Steven asked me what was wrong, but he received no concrete answer from me. I didn't want to talk about the situation to the children. I finally drifted off to sleep, with tears silently slipping down my cheeks.

The next morning, we arose, had breakfast, and broke camp. I wanted to go home and not go to dinner.

We drove and parked in front of a large nice home in the hills overlooking Provo. Quinn greeted us at the door. She seemed genuinely glad to have us in their home. Douglas was right, Quinn was a good cook and the meal was pleasant. I began to feel better. When we left, Doug followed us to the car.

I decided to take the opportunity to speak to him, and said, "Colin thinks you and Chase are gay. Are you?"

Doug wanted to tell me, but all he could see was my anger. He didn't want to tell me on the fly. He wanted to be able to have the time to talk it out.

"Answer me young man. Are you messing around with this homosexual business? If you are, you better quit. No son of mine is going to be mixed up with anything remotely resembling this."

I grabbed his arm. I saw anger flash across his face.

“Let go. You don't understand. Leave me alone.” He pulled his arm from my grasp and stormed back to the house.

I watched as the door slammed behind him. A sick feeling engulfed me as my eyes moistened.

With his hand on my shoulder, Deloy said, “Come on. Let's go home.”

We climbed into the motorhome. As we pulled away from the curb, I began to cry uncontrollably. My three youngest quickly came to the front of the motorhome. I could sense bewilderment from them. Several miles later, I began to get sick. Deloy stopped several times, as I fought to control my upset stomach.

The day after we returned home, I went to the doctor. He gave me some medication. He questioned why I was upset. I couldn't tell him. I couldn't bring myself to tell anybody of the terrible situation I was experiencing. The rest of the summer and into the fall, I spent all

of my energy trying to persuade Doug to come home.

Whenever we would talk, it ended badly. I prayed and pleaded with the Lord to change my son. I prayed for my son's repentance. As I read the scriptures, my depression grew. There seemed to be no hope. As I prayed, the phrase, "Just love your son," echoed in my mind.

Angrily I arose from my knees, "What? Just love my son?"

If I didn't love him, I wouldn't be concerned. He has to change. I only want what's best for him.

Christmas came. Doug came home, but he was cold and withdrawn. I had been called to the Stake Primary board.⁵⁰ As the weeks passed, I felt unworthy to fill the calling. I finally de-

⁵⁰ This board provides oversight helping smaller Ward primary organizations in the stake.

cided to call the High Councilman⁵¹ who administered over the Stake's primary organization. We had been good friends for many years.

Without giving any details, I said, "One of my sons is living contrary to gospel principles."

He assured me all parents have problems of one kind or another with their children. He convinced me I could not be held accountable for my son's actions. My best course of action would be to serve the Lord to the best of my ability. I decided to take his advice and stay in my calling.⁵²

The cold winter finally ended. I was glad to see spring come, but Doug still seemed no closer to changing.

⁵¹ This is a counselor assisting the stake president.

⁵² All callings are voluntary, and not a requirement for membership or any privilege enjoyed by church members.

Hopes Dashed

Chapter 8

The primary leaders were invited to attend the April General Conference.⁵³ I was looking forward to the diversion. Five of us drove to Salt Lake City, Utah and checked into a hotel. I had only been gone one day when Deloy received a phone call from Doug. Deloy said Doug sounded unhappy and wanted to talk to me. Deloy talked briefly to him and told Doug where I was staying. Doug hung up the phone, but wished he had told his dad how miserable he was. He needed his family.

⁵³ General Conference is a worldwide meeting of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Most members of The Church are home when they view the event. The event is therefore called “pajama church” by some members because they don’t have to get dressed to participate. The event is held in April and again in October every year.

These past months of guilt and self-loathing were almost more than he could bear.

Chase was comfortable with his homosexuality and accepted his feelings without misgivings. Doug, on the other hand, tried to overcome his feelings of homosexuality but was unsuccessful. Maybe if he moved home like his parents wanted him to, he would overcome these feelings and get on with his life.

I was wearing a pair of shoes that began to hurt my feet. When the meetings in the Tabernacle broke for lunch, I decided to return to the hotel to change my shoes. Two of the ladies came with me. They were chatting about the wonderful ideas we had received at the conference. We exited the elevator and turned the corner into a long hall. I was amazed to see Doug sitting on several bags outside my hotel room. I stopped in my tracks.

“Hi mom,” was Doug’s greeting.

The two women sensed this was a family affair and excused themselves.

I fumbled for keys as I searched for words. I opened the door and threw my purse on the bed before I turned to face my son.

“Are you alright? What are you doing here?”

I studied his face. My motherly instincts told me he was hurting. I stepped towards him. He dropped his bags, and wrapped his long arms around me.

“Mama, I want to come home. Please can I come home?”

Relief flooded my body, “Doug, of course you can come home. This is what we have been trying to get you to do.”

I believed he wasn’t really gay. He was just involved with something he couldn’t handle. He was going to come home, and everything was going to be alright. He was going to get back on track.

The other women and I planned to return to Idaho later that afternoon, but the car was too small for another passenger. I called Deloy and asked him to come to Salt Lake City to pick up Doug. Deloy headed for Utah immediately. More meetings were scheduled for the afternoon. I needed to attend, but I hated to leave Doug. I was afraid he would change his mind if I left him. We talked for about fifteen minutes. Doug assured me he would wait at the hotel.

After I left, Doug lay on the bed. He fell asleep almost immediately. He slept better than he had in weeks.

Although the meetings were interesting, I found it hard to concentrate. My thoughts were filled with questions about Doug. I wanted to take him home. Still, I was afraid. The meeting ended, and all us women returned to the hotel. I was relieved to see Deloy sitting in the parking lot outside the hotel. He got out of the car and accompanied me upstairs.

Deloy took the key from my hand and unlocked the door to the hotel room. Doug woke up with a start. He smiled as he saw his dad. He was going home. We were all going home together. The conversation on the way home was superficial. None of us wanted to discuss the events of the last several months. We were all relieved when the car turned into the driveway. The hour was late, and we went right to sleep.

I was happy we were all home, but it wasn't my Doug that came home. This was a sullen, withdrawn, unhappy young man.

The next morning, Deloy left for work. I woke the kids and prepared breakfast. Doug was the first to enter the kitchen. He set the table without saying anything. "Like old times," I thought.

When the three younger children realized Douglas was home, their excitement was uncontrollable. Wynette was especially thrilled. She chatted

continually, filling him in on all the news of the past few weeks.

Steven and Mark were preparing to go to camp. When we had finished eating, we were about the business of packing. Wynette still followed Doug around, chattering away. Doug cleared the table and helped with the dishes. Tiring of Wynette's talk, I sent her to clean her room.

Doug and I were left alone and I asked, "What are your plans?"

"Can I borrow the car to find a job?" was his reply.

I agreed and believed everything would be all right. Doug was getting back on track. I was hoping he would go through the repentance process, and maybe even reconsider the possibility of a mission.

Doug found a job in Idaho Falls, then settled into a routine. He wrote letters to his friend, Lynn Ann, and I thought there might be more to the relationship than there was. In truth, Chase

was the one in Doug's thoughts. Doug knew his parents were under the impression he had overcome his homosexual feelings. The truth was, he felt like he was living a lie. Each day became harder.

He wrote letters to Chase, then tore them up. Becoming more withdrawn, he spent as much time as possible in his room writing to his friends in Provo. I was becoming frustrated that he was not involved with us. He didn't join us for meals, and refused to join us in any family or church activities.

As the days went by, I started to get angry. This was not the way I had pictured his homecoming. The situation finally came to a head. I lost my temper and demanded Doug spend more time with us. My frustration grew as he resisted. The anger took over.

"You need to get involved with life again. I'm sick of your pouting," I shouted. "What's the matter with you? You're making us all miserable." I laid

down the law, "This is our home. You are expected to abide by our rules. Another thing, on Sunday you will go to church with us. We go to church in this family. You will go with us as long as you're living here. Do you understand me?"

Doug nodded his head. He understood this was not the way he had pictured his homecoming either. I walked away. This boy was a stranger. He was not the Doug I knew when he left home. This man was unhappy. I didn't know why. Doug went to church, but each night he would cry himself to sleep. This was not working. The feelings he had tried to suppress were still there.

One night as he struggled to fall asleep, he began praying. He poured out his grief and self-loathing to the Lord. A feeling of peace came over him. As welcome sleep finally came, he knew he had to accept himself as he was. The next morning he called Chase. That evening both Chase and Lynn Ann ar-

rived unexpectedly at our home. Doug knew his friends were not welcome, so they decided to drive to Idaho Falls. The entire time they were gone, I was filled with fear. I wondered if he would come back home. The opening of the back door and the sound of Doug going to his room brought extreme relief.

Our motorhome had developed a slight leak in the roof, so Deloy made an appointment with the dealer to get it fixed. Doug left for work, and the rest of the family headed for town. The repair work took most of the day. We returned home late in the afternoon. We pulled into the driveway and realized that the car Doug had been driving for work was in the garage.

I glanced at my watch. It was still too early for Doug to be home. Normally he wouldn't be off of work for another hour. I wondered why Doug was home.

Steven was the first to reach the door, "Mom, the doors are locked. Why does Doug have the doors locked?"

I felt a sickness racing in my stomach. Something was wrong.

We entered the house and, within a few minutes, realized Doug was not there. His room was empty and his clothes were gone. Mark walked past the stereo and noticed a note. He picked it up and called me over, "Mom, here's a note. Doug left a note."

I took the paper from him. It was a surprisingly pleasant note. Doug explained how much his friends liked our home. He expressed how much he loved each one of his family. The note ended with an apology. He was sorry things had not worked out, and he decided to leave with Chase and Lynn Ann.

I assumed Doug and Chase would go straight to Provo. I called Lynn Ann's sister, Mary Ellen. Mary Ellen was relieved to hear that Lynn Ann had been in Idaho, saying, "I was worried about her. Until now, I had no idea where she was."

Mary Ellen promised to call Chase's parents, and to let Deloy and me know when Lynn Ann got home. Chase's parents had no idea where Chase was. They were equally relieved when they heard Chase had been in Idaho.

Two days passed with no word from Mary Ellen. I couldn't stand it any longer. I called Mary Ellen and was horrified. She knew nothing of their whereabouts. Three weeks passed. Everyone was sick with worry. I found it hard to eat or sleep. Deloy went to work each day in a trance. The entire family was traumatized. Wynette pleaded in prayer each night for her brother's return. In spite of my great worry, I was angry. How could Doug do this to us?

Surely Doug must know how worried we were. I received a call from the department store where Doug had charged some clothing to the account he had there.

I thought, "If he thinks I'm going to pay his bills after what he put us through, he can think again!"

I took Wynette from the backyard and climbed in the car to drive to Idaho Falls.

I entered Doug's place of employment and told them he had to leave suddenly, and asked if Doug had any wages coming. Doug hadn't given them any notice, and had left them high and dry. That wasn't my Doug. My Doug was a responsible person. He wasn't inconsiderate of others. The manager invited me to come into his office.

He asked, "Where is Doug? He has left me in a bind. I guess you know I can't keep him on after this."

I sank into a chair pulling Wynette next to me. I began to cry as I said, "I don't know. Doug has disappeared. I don't know where he is."

The manager waited patiently until I could control myself. He could see how worried I was.

“I'm sorry Mrs. Nelson. I know how worried you must be. Don't be concerned about us. I'm sure I can find someone else to take his place.”

He went on to say he had been considering Doug as an assistant manager. Expressing how pleased he had been with Doug's work, he would not have expected anything like this. He wrote out Doug's paycheck and handed it to me. I gratefully took it from him. I was eager to leave after my outburst in tears. I drove to the bank, and kept enough to pay the department store, while depositing the remainder in Doug's savings account.

After I paid the department store, I headed for home. As I drove in silence, Wynette watched me carefully then said, “Mama, why is everyone mad at Doug?”

I told her, “Because he's done some things we don't agree with.”

With a puzzled look she said, “Shouldn't we love him anyway?”

Shocked, I answered, "Of course, we still love him."

"You don't act like it."

I had no answer, as I pondered my daughter's words the rest of the way home.

Five more weeks passed. A hopeless feeling overshadowed my days. My friends comforted me, but I couldn't bring myself to tell them Doug was gay. One afternoon I got a call from a fellow Primary Stake Board member.

She asked, "How are you doing today?" Then went on to say, "I have some news that might interest you."

I held my breath, "April, what is it?"

"Have you heard where Doug is?"

"No, I still don't know where he is."

"My daughter, Jennifer came home and said Susan Swenson has talked to him on the phone."

I gasped. "April, Susan is Deloy's cousin's daughter! How could she know

where he is and not tell us? The whole family knows what we have been going through.”

“I know. I couldn't believe it either. Jennifer said she has told several kids where he is. You better call her. I hope this helps you find him.”

“Thank you. I appreciate your call. Tell Jennifer thank you. I'll let you know what I find out.”

We exchanged goodbyes, then I dialed Susan's number. I waited impatiently as the phone rang. Susan's mother picked it up.

“Is Susan there?” I questioned.

“She's outside.”

“Let me speak to her, please.” I tried to keep the anger out of my voice. Recognizing my voice, she began to ask how I was. I interrupted her.

“Please. I need to talk to Susan.”

She shouted, “Susan! You're wanted on the phone. It's our cousin, Jeanine.”

Susan cautiously picked up the phone saying, "Hello."

"Susan, this is Doug's mother. I understand you've heard from him. Is that true?"

Susan began to deny she knew anything. With every word she spoke, I became more angry.

"Susan, Don't lie to me. Do you realize the hell we've been going through? If you know something, you'd better tell me right now. Well?"

Susan said, "Doug's whereabouts is really none of your business, and I promised him I wouldn't tell you where he is."

"Please Susan. Can't you see how hard this is for us. Please tell me."

"I can't. I promised. He wants me to get his check and send it to him. I promised I wouldn't tell you where he is."

My frustration was close to the breaking point.

“Susan, I demand to know where he is. It won't do any good to try to get the check, because I've already picked it up. Now tell me where he is.”

“I'm sorry. I can't. I promised him I wouldn't tell. I'm sorry.”

With those last words Susan hung up the phone.

I was angry. My body began to shake as I fought to bring my anger under control.

I complained aloud, “How inhuman of her to let me continue to suffer.” The thought finally came to me, “At least I know he's alright.”

It was difficult to understand why Susan couldn't see my suffering and help to alleviate it. The afternoon seemed endless as I waited for Deloy to return home. When he finally arrived, I was surprised at how calmly he took the news. His first words were, “At least we know he's alright.”

For the time being, we would have to accept things as they were. We didn't

have to wait long, because a few days later Doug called. Wynette answered the phone. I was out in the yard.

Wynette came running outside, "Mama! Mama, it's Doug. He sounds mad."

I ran into the house and picked up the phone, "Doug, where are you? We have been worried."

I barely got the words out before Doug rudely cut me off, "Who gave you the right to get my check?"

I was stunned. I couldn't remember Doug ever talking to me like that.

"I am sorry. Maybe I shouldn't have picked it up, but a bill came for you and I felt it was important to pay it."

"In case you haven't noticed, I'm an adult now. I can pay my own bills. I'm old enough to decide what to do with the money I earn."

Not able to decide whether to be angry or hurt, I hesitated.

"I'm mad at you, mom. This is none of your business."

I answered softly, "I can see you're mad at me. It is hard to miss, with the way you're talking to me. Apparently you have no idea what we have been going through these past three months. As far as I knew, you might have been dead, never to be heard from again. Do you think you're being fair?"

I waited for him to answer.

There were several seconds of silence. His voice was gentler when he spoke again.

"I need money."

"All I used was enough to pay your account at the department store. The rest is in your savings account."

I thought I heard him choke as he asked, "Could you send me the rest of it?"

"Of course Doug. Give me your address."

He gave a Seattle, Washington address, and explained he needed the money to get back to Provo.

“Chase and I are going to get an apartment and move in together.” He waited. I didn't answer.

“Mom? Are you still there?”

I was trying to fight back the tears.

“Mom?”

“Yes, Doug. I'm still here. You've made your decision, then?”

“I'm sorry, mom. I know it's not what you wanted for me. Mom, I love you.” He waited for me to answer.

“I love you too, Doug. I'll mail the money first thing in the morning. Would you please call when you get to Provo?”

When I hung up the phone, my heart was broken when I realized my son was gay. I think that was the point I needed to get to.⁵⁴

It seemed like an eternity before Deloy returned from work. My mind was in turmoil. What could I do? Where could I turn? Deloy arrived. We ate a

⁵⁴ A broken heart is referenced in scriptures such as Psalms 51:17.

silent supper. Deloy was relieved of the ordeal of not knowing the whereabouts of Doug. But, he could tell he had not heard the entire story. Deloy knew I would tell him when we were alone. I lay awake talking, then crying. There didn't seem to be any solution. I then realized my grief was every bit as intense as when my son Mike died, but it was different.

Spurious Knowledge

Chapter 9

We made a decision that we needed to go to the bishop to discuss our problem.⁵⁵ Deloy called and made an appointment. We fasted and prayed before we met with the bishop. The bishop welcomed us warmly as we entered the office. He looked into our faces and knew there was something terribly wrong. As he sat down, I started to explain why we were there.

After a few moments, I began to cry uncontrollably. Deloy gently took my

⁵⁵ Bishops and stake presidents are available to assist members. They are told to listen in the spirit of love and understanding to the best of their abilities. However, it is important to note that bishops and stake presidents are not usually trained counselors. The church does have trained counselors that the bishop can send people to, but any advice a leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gives are generally nontechnical thoughts.

hand and filled the bishop in on all the events of the past few months. He sat for several minutes after Deloy finished talking. He was stunned. He was just as sick to his heart as we were. He was dumbfounded by what we were saying. We needed to know. We needed help.

The bishop started to explain his regret about not being able to call Doug on a mission.⁵⁶

I thought, “The bishop is not near as disappointed as we are.” I found the courage to speak, “Please can't you help us?”

The bishop's eyes met mine. He had such sadness, “I'm sorry. I don't know what to do. I have never had any experience with this. I don't know what to do. Honestly, I do want to help you. I

⁵⁶ Missionaries must meet the minimum requirements for physical, spiritual, and mental health to serve. These requirements decrease the risk of problems often encountered by missionaries.

do. I don't know how. Maybe the stake president will have some answers.”

His love and concern was there, but he had no solution. I rose and turned toward the door.

Deloy shook the bishop's hand and thanked him. Deloy caught up to me, then we quietly walked home. Several days passed before we called the stake president to set up an appointment. Again, we fasted and prayed. The stake president reacted as the bishop had. First shock, and finally concluding he had no help for us. We were more discouraged than ever before.

We got up to leave the stake president's office. As we shook his hand, the stake president said, “Deloy, why don't you see your family doctor? Maybe he can help.”

Our family doctor was in another stake presidency in the area. He surely

had some medical information⁵⁷ about this. The stake president ended with, “I’m sorry. I wish I could've been more helpful.”

Deloy and I began to study the subject of homosexuality. We had to know what we were dealing with. We searched libraries and bookstores for information. We were shocked to find there was little information available. What information we did find, caused us grief. I felt guilty. I wondered if this was my fault. We saw several theories about the causes. One theory claimed that homosexuality was caused by a domineering mother. I searched my memory. Had I been a domineering mother? My personality was strong-

⁵⁷ Most people think that if you have a PhD or are an MD you are smart about everything. Such is not the case. Because Doug’s condition was not a medical condition, the medical doctor’s advice would be no more than his opinion and no more helpful than anyone else’s opinion.

willed: I insisted on chores being done; I insisted my children be well behaved; I insisted on everyone having manners. My mother had raised me to be independent and self-sufficient. I had tried to raise my children the same way.

I kept thinking, "Is this my fault? Had I turned my son into something I didn't understand?"

Another theory we encountered stated homosexuality was caused by a passive, nonexistent father. Again questions. Deloy had worked shift-work for many years. I wouldn't believe this was Deloy's fault. On his days off, Deloy was an excellent father. His whole life was dedicated to his family and to his children. He took the boys on camp-outs. He worked with them in their scouting activities.

Deloy started a league so Doug could play ball. He was concerned about his children. He arranged his vacations to be with us. Vacations were planned by the entire family. Everyone

was involved. Everyone contributed. He didn't miss anything the children were involved in. He wasn't a passive father. If this was our fault, why hadn't any other child been affected this way?

We also came across a theory that homosexuality was caused by a severe trauma in the third trimester of pregnancy. I spent several days going over the accident I had while I was pregnant with Doug. If only my car had not slid on the ice, and hit the stove as it came tumbling out of the pickup in front of me. Was it possible that the problems caused by the accident were exacerbated by our behavior? The guilt was tremendous.

People told us what a terrible perversion they thought homosexuality

was. We were confronted with the scriptures in the Bible.⁵⁸

Deloy and I searched the scriptures, repeatedly looking for comfort, but we found none. I struggled with it. I had a testimony of the truthfulness of

⁵⁸ God's Word Translation of Leviticus 18:22 declares, "Never have sexual intercourse with a man as with a woman. It's disgusting."

Sex can be used as power over another as demonstrated by privileged Roman society with sexual domination over the wife, mistresses, as well as male and female slaves.

Sex can be used as pleasure derived in the company of one or more. During sex chemicals are released in the brain and body creating a natural drug-trip that can be as habit forming as other drugs.

In Judaeo-Christian doctrine, sex is for creating people in a supported environment (family). If sex is not used with this purpose in mind, it's viewed as an abuse of the creative power given to people from God. Same-sex copulation cannot produce more people and is considered as an abuse of the body owned by God "For ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor 6:20).

the gospel. I had faithfully raised my children within the gospel success formula. I couldn't accept that my child was lost. Everything I had relied on didn't work anymore.

One study we saw said homosexuals were born that way. There's no way they could change. I felt helpless. If my son couldn't change, how could he repent? I believe strongly in the principle of repentance. I taught my children how to repent. My confusion became more intense with each passing day. I prayed many times a day. Doug was constantly on my mind.

The decision was finally made to visit the doctor. I made an appointment when Deloy had his next day off. I felt a resurgence of hope after the appointment was confirmed. As we visited with the doctor, he sat behind his desk taking notes. We had agreed that we would tell him everything we could think of in hopes he could find the cause and a cure. As we finished relating the events

of the last few months, he leaned back in his chair and said, "You know what you need to do, don't you?"

Finally, some answers. I was hopeful. My hope turned into astonishment, as he continued.

"Don't accept it. Demand your son change immediately. You must insist your son give it up totally. Do not accept his friends or his associations in your home. You don't want your home contaminated by those people. Let your son know you will not condone his behavior in any way."

Deloy and I left the doctor's office in silence. I was the first to speak.

"I'm confused," I said. "Surely Doug knows we don't condone his behavior. I don't like the idea of banning his friends from our home."

Deloy didn't reply for several minutes. I studied his face. I could see he was thinking about it. I waited for an answer. When he finally spoke, he chose his words carefully.

“We went to the doctor because we felt he was the one person who would have enough knowledge to give us some definite advice on what to do. He has given us that advice. We ought to follow it. He knows more about this than we do.”

“Deloy, I don't feel good about it. Do you?”

“No, I don't. I don't know anything about homosexuality. His advice is all we have at this point.”

I thought for a second. “I guess you're right. You're off work tomorrow. Should we drive to Provo and get it over with?”

“The sooner the better,” he said.

The next morning, Deloy and I left after the school buses picked up the kids. We drove to Provo and found Doug. He was glad to see us. He hugged us both, and his face filled with his wonderful smile.

I was relieved to see Doug. It made me feel good that he had missed

us as much as we missed him. We waited for an apology for the events of the last several months. None came. Deloy started to tell him about the visit to the doctor. As Deloy spoke, I could see Doug becoming defensive. We stated the conditions the doctor outlined. Chase would not be allowed in our home. Doug would be expected to get professional help as the doctor had suggested.

The atmosphere changed. He was no longer defensive. He was angry. The smile had vanished. Sparks flew from his eyes.

“If my friends are not welcome in your home, I am not welcome. Don't make me choose, because if I have to choose, I will choose Chase.”

Doug was rigid. Deloy and I could see that we had accomplished nothing good. On the ride home, I was devastated. I was sick to my stomach. I couldn't keep anything down. My mind was twirling. Was this right? We had

done what was right. A voice was screaming in my head that I was losing my son. My son was withdrawing. My son was leaving me. I was losing my son.

When we arrived home, the hour was late. I went downstairs to check on the kids. Finding everything in order, I went back upstairs to prepare for bed. Deloy had already retired. I switched off the lights to pray. All the feelings that had been building during the day came to the surface. I pleaded with the Lord for my son. As I finished praying, I stayed on my knees for several minutes. I was exhausted from the day's events.

I put my head on the bed quietly thinking, "Love your son." The thought kept going through my head. "I do love my son. I do love my son." What did this recurring thought mean? I had been reluctant to tell anyone the complete details. I felt telling the bishop, the stake president, and the doctor would solve the problem—it hadn't. I was having

stomach problems, and I could see I was losing weight.

The day after Deloy and I returned from Provo, my friend Sandra knocked on my door, "Jeanine, Are you home?"

I was glad to see her. I loved Sandra like a sister. Sandra had lost her baby as well, and we had many other things in common. Many times I wanted to tell her about Doug, but I was too embarrassed. Sandra sat on a chair. I could tell something was on her mind.

Sandra started out saying, "I know something is terribly wrong. I know it's got something to do with Doug. I am worried about you. Please talk to me. You know you can talk to me."

I wanted someone to talk to, but this was an embarrassing and taboo subject.

I thought, "What will she think of me? Will she hate me? I must've done something to cause this situation with my son. How can I share this with her?"

She must have seen the pain on my face. She rose up and sat next to me. She took my hand in hers and said, "Please, let me help you."

I began to cry, and was soon pouring out the entire story. Sandra was initially shocked as she realized what I had been going through. As I finished my story, I continued to sob softly. Sandra put her arm around me, "Don't cry, Jeanine. It's going to be alright. You raised Doug right. He's going to be fine. You'll see. It will take some time. But it's going to be alright."

As my crying subsided, I felt a sense of relief. Sandra didn't hate me. I began to think maybe people wouldn't turn on me when they found out about my secret. I gratefully hugged Sandra.

As the weeks passed, Deloy and I visited Doug frequently. At first things were strained. It was not easy. Several times we tried to apply a little pressure. We begged him to leave Provo and come home. We encouraged him to

change—to repent. Each effort to impose our viewpoints upon him, only caused him to be defensive. On one visit, we arrived in Provo to find Doug was not home.

We checked his job. He wasn't there either. I felt a surge of panic. What if he had run away? I didn't think I would ever be able to stand that. Deloy suggested we call Mary Ellen to find out if Lynn Ann knew where he was. Deloy dialed the number. Mary Ellen told us that Lynn Ann, Doug, and Chase were at the Pearsen's. They were a prominent couple; she was a writer. As we drove to the Pearsen home, I began to complain, "What are these people trying to do? I wish they would mind their own business."

As Deloy pulled up in front of the Pearsen home, we saw several young people. The Pearsen's children were in the yard. It appeared they were having a picnic. I felt a surge of jealousy. Doug saw the car pull up. We could see he

was pleased to see us. He quickly came to the car and invited us to join the group. I was reluctant at first.

The advice of the doctor went through my mind. "We don't want to intrude. We'll meet you back at your apartment later."

Doug insisted we join them. Karen Pearsen approached us and welcomed us warmly. Karen called one of the boys to bring two lemonades, while asking if we would like something to eat. Deloy declined, explaining we had just eaten. We accepted the lemonades as they were handed to us.

Karen called her husband over and introduced him. I felt uncomfortable. Deloy drifted away with Gerry Pearsen and was introduced to other people. Karen took us to some lawn chairs and invited us to sit down. I was finding it hard to hold up my end of the conversation. Karen didn't seem to notice. We chatted about unimportant things for several minutes. She said,

“You are having a hard time accepting Doug’s situation, aren’t you?”

I felt defensive. “What do you mean? I love my son.”

Karen smiled, saying, “Yes, I’m sure you do. I know how much I love my children. I hope you won’t mind—I’d like to give you some advice.”

I bristled and could feel my face getting warm as my anger rose.

Karen went on, “You need to accept Doug. He’s not going to change. If you want a good relationship with him, you must learn to accept him.”

I felt accused. I thought I was going to explode. Thoughts were tumbling through my head. I was thinking, “What do you know? Your children are all small. You’re not going through this experience. You don’t know what I’m feeling. You don’t know what it’s like to have a son with this problem.” I was angry and felt she was encouraging Doug’s homosexual behavior.

When I gained enough control, I called to Deloy and said, "We need to leave."

I felt if I acknowledged what Karen had said, I would completely lose control. Doug could see by the expression on my face something had happened. He excused himself from the others and climbed in the car with us. He leaned over the seat touching my shoulder.

"Mom, what happened? Did Karen say something?"

All the anger and pain I was feeling kept spilling out as I told my son what had been said.

Doug could see how hurt I was.

"Mom, please calm down. She wants to help. She is truly a good friend. She was only trying to help."

"Help? By telling me how to be your mother? She has no idea what I'm going through."

Doug felt he had to explain what Karen and Gerry's situation was. As he relayed the story of Gerry's homosexu-

ality and the struggle Karen was going through to save their marriage, I felt ashamed. I answered Doug, "Are you sure she isn't encouraging you boys because of her husband's problem?"

Doug was trying hard to be patient. He asked himself, "Will my mother ever understand?"

Doug had missed us, and wanted to spend some time with us. He finally decided to keep the conversation to other subjects. Apparently, discussing the LGBTQ+ issue at this time would get us nowhere. We talked with one another until I felt like Doug was coming around.

When Deloy and I arrived back home, I sat down and wrote a letter. In that letter, I pleaded with Doug to repent and return home. Days later, I received a letter from Lynn Ann. It was a scorching letter; a devastating letter. It told me what a horrible mother I had been to my son. She chastised me for my lack of understanding. The words pierced my heart as it accused me of wrongful

judgment. It was a truly vicious letter. I was sick.

I had only wanted one thing in my life: to be a good mother. This horrible thing that happened to my son was my fault? I had caused this? I had been a horrible mother? I was a failure at the one thing I had wanted most in my life? Deloy was working when the letter came, so I drove to Idaho Falls to share the letter with Chris and David.

Chris was going to college at the time. David was at work. I watched their faces as I gave them the letter. Chris said, "Doug needs to know what kind of friends he has. David can you get off of work? We need to go to Provo and talk to Doug."

Without speaking, David walked over to a supervisor. He asked for the rest of the day off. He picked up his jacket and headed for his car. Chris ran to join him. They drove to Provo. I drove home hoping my boys could help Doug see things their way. On the way to Pro-

vo, Chris and David discussed the situation. They had their suspicions, but failed to ask me too many questions to avoid upsetting me more.

David drove straight to Doug's apartment. Doug was not there, and it took a couple of hours to find him. In their search for Doug, they talked with several people who knew Doug at BYU. One friend confided to them the rumors he had heard about Doug being gay. They found it hard to believe.

When they finally found Doug, they bluntly confronted him with, "Are you gay?"

Their tone of voice put Doug on the defensive, and he vehemently denied it. Chris then presented the letter. Doug read through it, then read it again. Lynn Ann had told him she had written to his mother, but had not told him how vicious her words were. He was shocked.

Noticing Doug had completed the letter, Chris snatched it from his hands

and started tearing Lynn Ann's actions apart. Doug felt his anger growing. How dare his brothers attack him this way. When was his family going to see his side of the issue? As his anger increased, he found himself saying, "What's wrong with the letter? Every word is true. That's what kind of person she is. Mom doesn't love me for who I am. The only people who love me are my friends. At least they understand."

David leaped towards his younger brother, and had every intention of beating the daylights out of him. Immediately, Chris grabbed David from behind, restraining him from hitting Doug. As Doug's arms came up to protect himself, his anger intensified. The conversation became more heated. No wonder mom and dad were frustrated, Doug would not listen to reason. One thing the boys made clear to Doug is they were not going to allow their mother to be attacked, and it better not happen

again. On that note they departed for Idaho.

As Doug watched them leave, he started to shake and then he began to cry. He didn't agree with how Lynn Ann addressed his mother. He didn't mean all the things he had said to his brothers. What was happening to his life? In the next few weeks, the thought of suicide⁵⁹ came into Doug's mind more than once. He hadn't known a time when he had been more depressed.

Chris and David returned home and related what had occurred. I felt even more guilty. I was now the reason my sons were angry with each other.

⁵⁹ According to <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/suicide/symptoms-causes/syc-20378048> most suicidal thoughts come from feelings that you can't cope with an overwhelming life situation. If you don't have hope for the future, you may mistakenly think suicide is a solution. You may experience tunnel vision where, in the middle of a crisis, you believe suicide is the only way out.

Deloy and I discussed the situation. The next day we searched for a source of help. I talked with the doctor again. He still claimed we were doing the right thing. This “right thing” was driving our son away. We were driving him away!

We talked with the bishop and the stake president again. There were still no solutions offered, other than to pray about it. There was no place to turn, except to the Lord. This created a new struggle for me. How could I go to the Lord and ask him for help with this thing? This was my fault. I had committed some terrible sin, and the Lord was punishing me. I postponed praying. I procrastinated.

One hot, sultry evening, Deloy and I had gone to bed. It was hard to sleep. Lying awake, we were both quietly thinking, but not talking. Deloy finally drifted off to sleep. I laid there for a long time, unable to sleep. I quietly slipped on a robe, and went outside onto the front steps. Looking up at the star-filled

sky, thoughts of Doug filled my mind. A realization flooded my being. The only help I was going to get was from my Heavenly Father. I began to talk to Him.

I poured out my heart. I finally came to Him with a broken heart and a contrite spirit.⁶⁰ Anguish and grief poured forth. I begged for forgiveness for whatever I've done. I begged the Lord to stop punishing me.

"Bring back my son. Please. Bring back my son."

The tears rolled down my face as if a dam were released. I prayed and pleaded with the Lord until my strength was gone. I sat on the step, totally exhausted, with my head in my lap and tears streaming down my face.

⁶⁰ A phrase used in scriptures such as Psalms 51:17. A broken heart is when a person accepts that their way has completely failed. A contrite heart is when a person comes to the conclusion that they must no longer continue on their own terms but on God's terms.

Then a feeling came over me. It felt like a blanket around my shoulders and engulfing my whole body. It was a feeling of complete peace and well-being. As the feeling overcame me, I heard a voice. It was a quiet voice, yet with strength, saying, "It's going to be alright. Trust in Me. Judgment is Mine. Just love your son."

I finally got it. It was not my right to judge. My mission was to love my son, not solve his problems. I finally listened to the Lord. I knew what to do. I started a campaign to just love my son.

I called Doug the next morning. The conversation was a good one. I didn't know what happened, but he immediately sensed the difference in my attitude. This was more like the mother he had been close to earlier in his life. He felt I was accepting him at long last. His sense of self-esteem was returning.

Doug decided he needed more of an education. A good friend in Provo had been cutting his hair for sometime.

One day as he sat in her chair chatting, the subject turned to his desire for a good line of work. He expressed an interest in cosmetology. She encouraged him, and offered to get him a scholarship to cosmetology school. A couple of weeks passed. Doug called home with some good news.

Doug and Chase were moving to Salt Lake. Doug was going to cosmetology school. I was excited. Maybe at last Douglas was finding some direction in his life. I was surprised at his choice, but felt relieved. It was a good occupation that many gay men pursued. He wouldn't have to face much discrimination. The boys moved to Salt Lake, and Doug started school. He began to call more often. I began to catch a glimpse of the Doug I loved. He showed his old dedication to his studies. He was beginning to set goals.

As he settled into his life in Salt Lake, Doug began to invite his family to visit as often as possible. There were

many fun things to do in Salt Lake.
Doug searched out activities that he
knew his family would enjoy. He found
all the good restaurants and the plays.
He enjoyed making each visit better
than the last one.

The Growing Season

*During the past year and a half,
Or maybe even two,
I watched you struggle,
Not quite knowing what to do.*

*As you strived to know,
The end within your soul.
I felt the peace as I gained,
A glimpse of Mercy's goal.*

A Positive Outlook

Chapter 10

The entire family enjoyed spending time with Doug. I felt good as I watched my family start to mend. Chase was not nearly as excited about the visits as we were. It became more evident with each visit. Chase resented our time with Doug. I noticed the hostility. Commenting to Deloy, I wondered what the problem was. Deloy felt Chase might feel like an outsider. Maybe Chase felt pushed aside. We then tried to include Chase, but he didn't wish to participate.

David had found the girl of his dreams. He and Jeri were going to be married in June. As the boys grew and went their separate ways, we missed the good times we shared when they were younger. David requested we all come early so we could spend a few days camping before going to the wed-

ding. I listened carefully as David made a call to Doug. They hadn't been together since the blowup. Whenever we went to Salt Lake City to visit Doug, David was always unable to go.

I listened to David's conversation with Doug. When he hung up the phone, David smiled. The bad feelings among the boys were being erased. The boys arrived home and began making plans to take a trip to the hills. We packed our gear. The joy in my heart was overwhelming. My family was back together again.

Steven was now in high school. He was eager to do things on his own, and suggested he go to Salt Lake City to spend a weekend with his brother. I stalled him by telling him we would have to get his father's approval. He had been spending the summers working at scout camp for years, so it wasn't as if he had never been away from home before. I was concerned about the long drive and what might be en-

countered. Deloy approved the trip, and I stayed close to the phone the entire weekend.

I halfway expected to get a frantic call from Steven asking us to rescue him. No call came. That Sunday evening he arrived home. I was relieved to have him back home again. He didn't say anything, and went straight to his room.

I followed him downstairs. "Did you have a good time?"

He slowly turned to face me.

"Mom, why didn't you tell me Doug is gay?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but the words wouldn't come.

Steven went on to say that Doug and Chase weren't getting along. Steven ended with, "Chase propositioned me."

"Steven, I'm sorry. Dad and I didn't know how to tell you kids. I guess we thought we could protect you from it."

“Protect me from what? From wanting to be gay? I’m not gay. Is this why you and Doug have been having problems?”

I took my son’s hand and we sat on the bed.

“Steven, I have to know. What did you do when Chase propositioned you?”

“I told Doug, of course.”

“What did Doug do?”

“He told me he was gay, and was in a relationship with Chase. I don't understand. Why didn't you tell us?”

I had not expected this. I searched for words to explain my actions that now seemed foolish. We had not given our children enough credit.

“I am sorry Steven. To tell you the truth, we haven't known what to do. We are barely starting to deal with it ourselves. Please forgive us.”

Steven could see my pain. He put his arms around my shoulders. Then he told me of the severe argument Doug

and Chase had. Doug was upset with Chase for what he had done. Their relationship had been deteriorating for some time. Chase's proposal to Steven brought it to an end.

When Deloy got home the next morning, we decided to call a family council to discuss everything with my children. Deloy proceeded to tell his children and daughters-in-law about the situation. Both Deloy and I were surprised Chris and David knew, and that Mark had some strong suspicions.

As we talked it over, I was relieved my children did not display the attitude I experienced. Chris's wife, Rhonda, summed up everything beautifully by saying, "I don't see that we can do anything except love and accept him as part of the family."

That was the same answer I got from my prayer, "Love him."

Doug was doing well in cosmetology school. He responded favorably to the change in attitude of his family. His

schooling was wrapping up, and he needed a model for his board test. Several of his friends offered to model for him. As he contemplated whom to use, he was struck with the idea of using me for his model. He asked me the next time I called. I was excited about the opportunity. Doug smiled as he hung up the phone. Maybe our relationship was finally going to heal. We could be good friends again.

When the time came for the test, my friend Sandra and I drove to Salt Lake City. We stayed at Sandra's sister's, and I spent all day with Doug. I was thrilled with the good time we had together. We talked for hours, joking as he styled my hair and gave me a manicure. I laughed, as he told me he hated doing manicures. If he passed the test, that would probably be the last manicure he ever did. Two days flew by much too fast. I hated to leave. We hugged each other.

As Sandra and I drove home, I told her of the wonderful time I had spent with my son. When Doug learned he had passed his board, he moved back to Provo for work. Our family went to Provo often to visit and letters resumed. Wynette looked forward to being with Doug again. He wrote special letters to her.

Doug talked me into getting my ears pierced. Doug saw to it that I had a collection of the latest styles in earrings. Wynette, now twelve, begged to get her ears pierced as well. Deloy and I told her repeatedly, she would have to wait until she was 16.

On one visit, Doug was giving me a permanent. Wynette was rearranging bottles near Doug's chair. Doug put me under the dryer and went over to his sister. Both Doug and Wynette came back to get me. Wynette was hiding behind Doug. I could tell they were up to something. I had seen their mischief often in years past.

“OK you two, what are you up to?”

Doug flashed his big grin. “What do you mean mom? What would we be up to?”

Wynette giggled from her hiding place, peeking out from behind Doug.

“Come here young lady. I know you two are conspiring about something.”

Wynette took a step forward towards me. I saw a flash of jewels in her ears.

Doug started to con me as he had done his whole life.

“Come on now. It's not going to hurt anything. Doesn't she look cute? You don't mind now, do you Mama?”

I could never resist his smile, especially when he called me Mama.

“Well, I guess it's done now. It wouldn't do me any good to object. You two are a real pair.”

Wynette grinned, and wrapped her arms around my neck with a big hug.

I smiled at Doug, as he winked at Wynette.

Doug was in a new relationship. Carlos was a Cuban and an orphan. De-loy and I had decided to work on a good relationship, and make Carlos feel welcome. We tried to treat him like we would any of the children's friends. Carlos responded positively. He had been without a family of his own for some-time, and enjoyed the family activities with us. I had come to the realization that I could not blame others for Doug being gay. It wasn't Carlos's fault.

Doug and Carlos came home for Christmas. I was making preparations for dinner, when Doug joined me in the kitchen. I was grateful to have him at my side again.

As Doug prepared the salad, I asked, "Doug, Are you happy?"

“Yes, mom, I'm happy. I now realize I can't change. This is the way I am. I'm happy. Could you be happy for me? Please.”

I thought, “Just love your son.” I would have to love and accept him the way he was. I realized it wasn't my fault. I replied, “If you're happy, it makes me happy.”

Doug gave me a grateful smile.

Steven was now nineteen and preparing to go on a mission. Although the relationship with Doug was much better, I still had concerns for his salvation. I agonized over my son's faith. I prayed often, wanting my son to have the blessings of the gospel. One day, thoughts of Doug filled my mind. As I was making Steven's bed, I fell to my knees and poured out my heart to the Lord, asking him for help for my son. As I knelt, there was such peace.

I remembered what the Lord had said, “I'll take care of it. Just love your son.”

That night I had a dream. I saw myself in the Idaho Falls Temple. I was standing in the prayer circle.⁶¹ Douglas was standing by me. I awoke overjoyed. I was convinced the Lord was going to help my son repent. Doug was going to overcome his affliction. He was going to repent. We were going to go to the temple. I was going to stand in the prayer circle with my son.

⁶¹ This is a prayer similar to the practice of holding hands around the table while praying over dinner. Instead of food, the prayer is for the blessing of people. The prayer is in a free form content, rather than a rote recital.

The apostolic prayer circle is described in the apocryphal Acts of John, first published in English in 1897: "He bade us therefore make as it were a ring, holding one another's hands, and himself standing in the midst he said: 'Answer Amen unto me.'" Greek, Syriac, and Coptic texts also indicate similar circles. See "The Apocryphal New Testament" by M. R. James Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924 for more details.

As the days went by, I began to doubt. Maybe it wasn't Doug in the dream. Maybe it was Steven. Steven was leaving on his mission soon. The time arrived for Steven to leave on his mission. We went to the Idaho Falls Temple. It was a large session. There were over twenty young people who were to receive their endowment⁶² that evening. When it came time to go to the prayer circle, Steven was unable to participate because of the unusually large group. I didn't stand in the prayer circle with Steven.

Later, I thought it might be Mark that I saw in the dream. Mark decided to get married instead of serving a mission. When he went through the temple, Cheri, his bride, was at his side in the prayer circle. I continued to cling to my dream that someday I would stand in the Idaho Falls Temple with Doug.

⁶² Endowment is the "gift" of the plan of salvation from the Atonement of Jesus Christ through faith.

The next two years went by quickly. I felt close to Doug and we visited often. Steven returned from his mission, and he and his high school sweetheart, Diane, were married. They prepared to attend Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. Doug's friends, Gerry and Karen Pearsen, moved to California.

Doug was talking about moving to California as well. We suspected Doug was now using drugs. We knew he was now drinking and smoking. I was concerned about his substance abuse. Doug called one day with the news he and Carlos were moving to California. It was like a knife through my heart. I feared this would damage our relationship.

Deloy and I went to Provo to try and talk Doug and Carlos into staying in Utah. Although nothing had been said, Doug felt we objected to his drinking and smoking. The crowd he associated with all drank and smoked, and even used some drugs—mostly marijuana.

When we arrived, Doug knew I wanted to have one of “my talks” with him.

As we prepared the evening meal, Doug realized he needed milk. As he departed for the grocery store, I took the opportunity to go with him.

I asked, “Why move to California?”

Doug replied, “Mom, if I stay in Provo, I’ll be an embarrassment to Steven. Many people know I’m gay. That will hurt him. Besides, all of my good friends have moved to California.”

I replied, “What about us? Don’t you want to be near us?”

Doug responded, “Not if it’s going to hurt you. Mom, I love you. I’ll visit often.”

There was no changing his mind.

A few weeks later, Carlos and Doug made the move. They moved in with Lynn Ann at first. Doug had trouble getting his cosmetology license. It was taking longer than he had planned, and he couldn’t find work while he was wait-

ing. Carlos was developing a serious drug problem, and there were a series of verbal confrontations. When Doug finally called, I began to chastise him for not calling sooner.

Doug interrupted, "Mom, please don't scold me. Maybe you're right about me moving down here. Things haven't been going well." Doug humbly explained their situation. "We don't have enough money to eat very much or find a place to stay."

I recoiled at the thought of Doug without a place to sleep or food to eat. I promised Doug I would send money immediately. Deloy arrived home a few minutes later. We went to the Western Union, and sent enough money to see the boys through the next few weeks.

For a long time after the money transfer, Doug did not write, or send cards, or call for our anniversary, or holidays, birthdays, or Mother's day. This was so unlike him. I wanted things to be like they used to be.

Doug found a temporary job. Carlos's drug use intensified. Doug knew he couldn't continue to support himself and Carlos too. He called to tell me of their break-up. I had grown fond of Carlos, and was sad for his drug use. I would never see him again.

Doug rented a room and started to pull his life back together. Six months later, he got his cosmetology license. I missed Doug terribly. Doug gave us a couple of phone numbers where we could occasionally catch him. I didn't understand why he seemed to have pulled away. He felt guilty and it was easier not to talk with me. It would be a couple of years before Deloy and I could finally go to California to visit Doug.

I went through a long growth of realizations. At first I pleaded with the Lord for Doug's repentance. In doing so I came to the realization: "The only person I can change is myself." I began to have more empathy and understanding

for other people. David and Jeri went with us to California, along with Wynette. Steven was living in Reno, Nevada. Diane had given birth to a lovely baby girl. We spent a few days with Steven and his family before we traveled to Berkeley, California.

It was a warm April day when we arrived at the beauty salon where Doug had his own chair. It was good to see him. We entered the shop, and there were hugs all around. We were glad to be together again. Doug had arranged his schedule to do everyone's hair. We chatted continually as he worked on each of us. There was much to catch up on. Although I called him regularly, it was much better to get all the news firsthand.

Wynette followed him everywhere. She was now in high school. She had much to share with her brother and good friend. He teased her about making her so beautiful the boys would flock around her when she got home. I

was pleased at how Doug looked. Deloy sat in a chair beside me, reading a magazine. As we joked, I reached for Deloy's hand. He watched everyone momentarily and smiled.

Our son was doing better. Doug was excited about his family coming to visit. He had made some special plans. We went to his rented room. It certainly wasn't the Taj Mahal, but an older well-kept home. It was within walking distance of the beauty shop. We entered the house. As we entered, an older man came from the kitchen. Doug introduced his landlord, Alan, to us.

I smiled with pride as he commented, "This is the wonderful Idaho family I've heard so much about. This isn't all of you. I know, because Doug talks about a lot more people than this."

Doug then showed us his room. The room was small but comfortable. On the dresser were several sweaters; all the ones I had knitted for him. He patted the pile as he explained he was

preparing to take them to the cleaners explaining, "They are the main part of my wardrobe."

Doug smiled when he realized his room pleased me. "Mom, what do you think of my humble abode?"

"It's nice dear. Looks like you have everything you need. Do you eat meals with Alan?"

"Usually breakfast. I eat lunch and dinner out, most of the time."

We then joined the rest of the group in the living room. Alan was pleasantly entertaining everyone.

Doug had arranged for dinner at one of Berkeley's best seafood restaurants. I was pleased with his choice, as I always enjoyed a good seafood dinner. Doug wanted us to meet some of his good friends. He arranged for them to be at dinner also. Thanking Alan for his hospitality, we departed for the motel, where we changed to prepare for a special evening.

The knock on the motel door indicated Doug had arrived. Wynette ran to open it. Doug stepped into the room followed by a blonde, handsome young man. I knew instantly that Doug and he were more than friends. Doug seemed nervous as he introduced Peter Whilt. Peter was quiet, and stood to one side of the room, watching the interactions among the family members. I liked him instantly, and wanted to get to know him better.

As I tried to visit with Peter, I had the feeling he was uncomfortable. He acted like he was intruding. I tried to help him feel part of the group. As the evening progressed, I found him to be intelligent. He was educated, immaculate in his dress, and polite. Doug had been apprehensive about introducing Peter to his family.

His previous two relationships had been difficult ones. He knew I had especially been concerned. Doug watched me as Peter and I conversed.

He could see I was impressed with Peter. As the conversation progressed, he could see Peter relax. Doug's relationship with Peter was the best he had ever had. Peter was a kind and gentle person.

As Doug and Peter's relationship progressed, I could see a difference in Doug's attitude about many things. He became more conscious about birthdays and holidays. When Wynette turned eighteen, Doug sent her eighteen red roses. Each Christmas, a beautiful floral centerpiece appeared. With each visit, we could see Doug drinking less, and there was no evidence of drugs. Doug finally quit smoking. He was proud of himself when he realized he finally licked it.

Peter's field of work was nutritional research. He encouraged Doug to have a healthy diet. Exercise became important for both of them. They bought mountain bikes, and used them several times a week in the beautiful hills above

Berkeley and Oakland. I enjoyed the wonderful meals Doug and Peter prepared when we visited.

The Good Life

Chapter 11

Doug started his own cosmetology business. Our family loved to copy the latest fashions Doug wore. I noticed the grandkids all had their collars turned up. I stopped one of them and proceeded to turn the collar down. The reaction was immediate.

“Grandma, don't turn our collars down! It's the style. We learned it from Uncle Doug.”

Wynette had graduated from high school and was off to college. There she met Garret. They were married in December 1985. Wynette was eager for Garret to meet Doug, and encouraged us to take a vacation to Berkeley the next summer. It had been a while since David and Jeri had been there. Steven and Diane had another baby daughter, so we combined the two visits and headed for Reno then on to California.

Doug was apprehensive about meeting Garret. Garret was not sure what to expect. The cool ocean breezes felt good in Berkeley, after the hot July heat in Nevada. Doug and Peter had a cute house on the North side of Berkeley. Within a few minutes of the introductions, it was evident Doug, Peter, and Garret were going to be good friends.

Doug arranged his client appointments so he could spend all of his time with us. Doug made plans for visiting several places. We visited a park where an old-fashioned carousel still stood in the middle of the square. We were like children, as we rode several times on beautiful carved animals. As we walked from the park, I took Deloy's hand as the five kids walked in front of us.

Deloy smiled down at me as he said, "Neat vacation; right honey?"

Replying, I said, "Sure is. Thanks for inviting me."

Doug and Peter had bought tickets to a popular two-man play in San Francisco. We spent the day sightseeing. Jeri, Wynette, and myself marveled at the beauty of the Embarcadero Center. Peter knew of a great seafood restaurant nearby. Peter took my arm, and pointed towards the restaurant and said, "I'm as big a seafood fan as you are." We strolled back to the others, and convinced them seafood was the only way to go.

After dinner we hopped on a trolley to the theater. It was quite interesting to see these two talented actors play all the parts. I lay in bed, happy for my children, and silently thanked the Lord as I drifted off to sleep. The day to go home came much too soon. As the men packed, I sat at the table reading the newspaper. Several articles about AIDS caught my eye. I hadn't heard much about the disease except a few things on the television in the national

news. As I looked at the articles my concern began to grow.

Doug left for work and Peter busied himself about the kitchen. Jeri and Wynette visited in the living room. Peter joined me at the table with a glass of fresh squeezed orange juice and said, "I'm glad you came to visit. I surely hope you can come again soon."

"We enjoyed ourselves. I hope you and Doug will come to Idaho soon." Peter smiled and said, "I'd like that. I've never been to Idaho. Doug says it's a beautiful state."

I glanced at the newspaper in front of me and asked, "Peter, what about this AIDS thing? Sounds scary."

Peter explained about the disease, trying to reassure me. He felt there was nothing to worry about, saying, "Doug and I have been tested and the tests were negative. We are totally monogamous; completely faithful to each other. I don't think you have any cause to worry."

I felt a sense of relief. We left for home thinking the situation was under control.

Deloy had not forgotten his dream of a mountain cabin in the beautiful hills near our home. We found a piece of property. We saved until we had the money to build a cabin. With the help of David and Garret, we built up the walls to the point of needing to add the roof. One evening, we discussed the task of putting up huge heavy rafters.

David suggested we make it a family affair. Chris and Steven had been home periodically to help where they could. David called all of his brothers and suggested we have a family reunion. Everyone could help put up the rafters on the roof. We could spend some quality time together camping, like we had done many years before.

Everyone made plans and reported back to David. David could hardly contain his excitement when he got the news Doug and Peter would be there. It

had been several years since Doug had been home. This was something David had to tell us in person. He started sharing the news with Jeri. They entered our back door and I was surprised to see them. They were usually too busy to stop by in the middle of the week.

“David, is there something wrong?” David fought to keep a straight face. “Mom, I've got some news.”

I searched his face for some clue, “Good news or bad news?”

“What kind do you want?”

I could see he was teasing.

“Probably the good news.”

Jeri standing behind him, smiled broadly. She knew how pleased Deloy and I were going to be.

“Get ready for this mom and dad.” David hesitated for a second and then said, “Doug and Peter are coming to help with the cabin.”

I shrieked with delight. Deloy hugged me tightly.

At some point in the next two weeks, the whole family would be home to help Deloy complete the cabin. The mountain was like a small tent city. Wherever a flat spot could be found there was a tent. The fire pit and the long sixteen-foot picnic table were a focal point, as the women set up their outdoor dining area to feed the large crew. Up on the hill, the cabin was beginning to take shape. We could see the cabin through the large Douglas fir trees. The next few days were exhausting. The men worked hard from daylight until twilight, and then began to drift down the hill to the campsite.

The girls spent hours fixing meals over the campfire, cleaning up, and directing the activities of energetic grandchildren as they ran through the trees, uninhibited by the rules applied at home. We sat around a dying campfire, listening to the owls and night birds as they flew through the trees looking for food.

Deloy and I listened as my children reminisced about childhood memories of these beautiful mountains. Deloy and I laughed as we told stories to one another. I snuggled close to Deloy. As the embers of the fire began to die, each person drifted to their own campsite. All those who made my life worthwhile were close by.

The next day, heavy roof beams were to go up. The big question was how to get the heavy beam roof trusses lifted up into place. A steel cable was looped between two old growth Douglas firs high above the roof-line. Garret was in one tree and Doug was in the other. The cable was situated with pulleys and ropes. A truss would be lifted up to the second story by the pulley system, and then once it was at the roof level, the men would move it into place and secure it.

The girls returned to dinner preparation as the men raised the first beam into place. A few minutes later, a yell

from the cabin caused us to run up the hill. I felt as if my heart was about to stop. I was relieved to see everyone was safe. Doug was leaning against the beam, visibly shaken. Chris explained the cable had slipped, and the huge beam slid to the ground, barely missing Doug. David climbed his tree again, re-vising the cable set up on his end.

I watched apprehensively as the rafter was slowly lifted up again. The rafter was then moved into place without further mishap. The rest of the rafters were soon in place, and the work of putting on the roof began. The time finally came for everyone to return to their separate homes.

Deloy and I stood on the deck of the cabin and watched each car drive down the hill. Deloy put his arms around my shoulders. I smiled up at him. We stepped through the doorway of the cabin.

Deloy spoke, "Honey, this week has been one of the best. Wouldn't you say?"

I agreed, "One of the best."

In March 1987 Peter and Doug took a trip to Jamaica. Peter didn't feel well almost the entire time they were gone. When they returned, Peter discovered he had lumps under one arm. He made an appointment with the doctor. When Doug returned home from work that evening, he found Peter sitting quietly on the couch staring into space. Doug sat beside Peter. Doug had a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. Something was terribly wrong. "Peter, what's wrong?" Peter began to cry.

Doug took him in his arms and held him until the crying subsided. When Peter could control the tears, he told Doug the devastating news he had received. The doctor had taken a routine test. The lumps were lymph node

cancer. "Doug, they tested for HIV again. I'm HIV positive."

"How could that be? The tests we took were negative."

Peter explained how the first tests were faulty adding that, "The tests are much more accurate now."

There wasn't much doubt. Peter was HIV positive. Doug wanted to comfort Peter, telling him everything was going to be alright. He didn't want Peter to be sick, and he didn't want to be sick either. They talked for a few hours, discussing what to do next with their lives. They decided the first thing they needed to do was notify their families. Doug made the call to Idaho. I listened, almost unable to comprehend the devastating news.

"Son, Do you have AIDS too?"

"I don't know mom. I have not been tested recently."

"Is there a chance you don't have it?"

"I'd rather not know."

I reacted to his statement. "You can't be that way. You have to be tested. There's a lot of research going on. If you have AIDS maybe there's something that will help, if they catch it early enough."

We discussed the subject back-and-forth for several minutes. Doug finally agreed to think it over and call me back.

I hung up the phone. Dread filled my soul. I couldn't believe this was happening. It had to be a bad dream. Deloy and I spent the summer trying to persuade Doug to be tested. As the month passed, Peter became more ill. The chemotherapy treatment sometimes seemed worse than the disease itself. Doug's brothers and sister called him frequently, encouraging him to be tested.

Deloy and I had learned to love Peter as if he were one of our own children. We kept in constant touch with the boys, following the progress of Pe-

ter's illness with heavy hearts. As the months passed, the questions about the mortality of Doug and Peter's relationship became irrelevant. The sadness everyone felt as Peter's condition deteriorated was the only thing that seemed important.

I spent many months contemplating the extreme goodness displayed by both boys. They were not criminals. I only wanted them to live their lives. Now their life together was being taken away.

In September the phone rang. I answered it.

"Mama?"

I knew what the call was about. Doug had been tested. He was positive. The T-cells⁶³ were supposed to be

⁶³ They're also called T lymphocytes. There are two main types of T-cells: Cytotoxic T-cells that destroy infected cells and helper T-cells that send signals to direct other immune cells to fight infection.

about 500. Doug's T-cell count was down around 450.

Doug did his best to reassure me with positive things he could do to increase his chances. I listened as he talked about good exercise and good nutrition. Aware of the good lifestyle Doug and Peter had been living the past few years gave me a sense of hope. Doug felt well. He followed the exercise and nutrition program. His T-cells were slipping downward, but on the surface Doug felt good.

I could feel Peter slipping from us. We decided we had to go to California to spend some time with the boys. Our trip was planned between Peter's chemotherapy treatments, with the hope he would feel well enough to enjoy some time with us. Wynette and Garret decided to accompany Deloy and I on the trip. Doug met us at the airport and we caught up on the latest details of Peter's illnesses as we drove to the

house. I entered the front door catching a glimpse of Peter.

Peter was busy in the kitchen preparing one of his tasty gourmet meals for us. I sat my suitcase down and walked towards him. As he turned, I took him in my arms and held him close. We both could feel the love we shared. I took a step backwards. With my hands on his shoulders, I looked into his eyes. The tears began to course down his cheeks. I wiped them away with my finger, and softly kissed him on the cheek. He was embarrassed.

He had lost all of his hair to chemotherapy. He had such beautiful blonde wavy hair that Doug styled fashionably. My attention turned to the meal he was preparing. The aroma was delicious as I lifted the lids from the pots on the stove. He smiled at my pleasure. Peter loved cooking and being appreciated for his talent.

The rest of the group entered the kitchen, and greetings were exchanged.

The meal was pleasant in every way. The food was especially good. Peter had outdone himself. The conversation was easy and comfortable. Doug smiled at Peter. They were both happy to have their family with them.

The week passed quickly. The boys entertained us as usual with interesting and fun things to do. Most of the time Peter felt well enough to accompany us to our activities. When the time came to fly home both boys drove us to the airport. Peter and I hugged. I kissed him on the cheek, knowing I was saying goodbye. Peter was feeling better, so he and Doug made plans to fly to Hawaii for one last vacation together.

Peter did well on the trip. When they returned home, his condition worsened. He could no longer work. I called frequently. Peter and I had several long talks. My appreciation for him grew each time we spoke. He was a fine, young gentleman. He was considerate and sensitive to the feelings of others.

His bravery was incredible. His main concern was for Doug. My love for Peter grew. May 1989 came.

Deloy and I decided to spend Mother's Day holiday with Steven and his family. We took four days off, and enjoyed a weekend with Steven, Diane, and the children. Upon returning, we found a message on the answering machine from Doug. I called him immediately.

When he heard my voice he began to sob. "Mama, Peter's sick. He has been in the hospital for a couple of weeks. He has reached the point where the hospital can no longer do anything for him."

Peter wanted to go home. Doug was taking him home to spend the last few days of his life. Doug had been trying to take care of Peter himself. Doug was tired and depressed. I talked to Doug for several minutes. I tried to comfort him and give him some hope to keep him going.

At the end of the conversation he said, "By the way, mom, happy Mother's Day."

I said, "I would be a lot happier if Peter were doing well. I hate losing him."

Doug replied "Yeah, I wish it could have been different."

The next 10 days I went about my daily activities. Deloy and I would jump each time the phone rang, as we glanced at each other apprehensively. Peter's sister spent a week with Doug, helping care for Peter. She finally had to return to work. Peter drifted in and out of a coma.

Doug tried to carry the burden alone. He became exhausted. Deloy and I called every two or three days to give comfort and support the best we could. I offered to fly down and help. Doug said Peter's parents were going to hire a nurse to come in at night so Doug could get some sleep. Still he couldn't sleep very well.

When I realized Peter was going to die, I began to reflect on the happenings of the past years. I wanted to understand what had happened. I wanted to know the significance of all we had gone through.

On May 24, I went to a scouting meeting. Upon returning home I found a message on the answering machine.

“Mama, this is Doug. It’s now 7:20. It’s a bummer.”

It was 10 PM Idaho time when I returned home. I immediately dialed Doug’s number. Doug answered the phone. Hearing my voice he burst into tears. “Mama, Peter’s gone.”

Although I had expected the news for days, I was still shocked.

Fear began to take over as I thought of Doug. I wanted to comfort him in his grief. I was aware of Doug's voice telling me the morgue had left with Peter’s body. Peter was going to be cremated. There wouldn't be a service until the middle of June. I offered to

fly to California to be with him. He declined my offer, saying he wanted to be alone for a couple of days. He wanted to try to pull himself together.

When I finished talking with Doug, I called the other members of the family. With each call, I was met with concern for Doug. We also feared for Doug's future. The Wednesday after Peter's death, in the middle of the afternoon, I was feeling tired and exhausted. I decided to lie down and take a nap. It was hard to accomplish anything. My thoughts wandered constantly to Doug. I could only imagine what he must be going through. I wished there was something I could do to take away his burden.

As I laid down, the fatigue seemed to consume my body. My mind however, couldn't seem to find any rest. I laid there looking at the ceiling, praying for relief. The phone startled me, as it rang sharply in my ear. I reached for it, and was relieved to hear Doug's voice. He

was tired. He hadn't had much sleep. Depression filled his voice.

Controlling his emotions, Doug spoke. "Mama, I am sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you. I didn't mean to cause anyone any pain. Why Mama? Why has this happened? There hasn't been a day in my life I haven't thought about everything. I wish things could've been different. Mama, I can't change. I've tried. I am the way I am. Why did this happen to me? I didn't mean to hurt you. I'm sorry."

The sobs began to come uncontrollably. I had no answer for him. The pain for my son was breaking my heart. I wanted to take him in my arms and tell him it was going to be okay. For years, I had prayed he would call and tell me he was *sorry*. The call had come. There was no comfort in it. All I could feel was the pain and grief. At the moment, I would've done anything to take his pain away. It was out of my hands.

This was not a choice Doug had made willingly. This was something life had handed him. Only the Lord knew why. We could only put our trust in Him. I did my best to reassure Doug of my love for him. I encouraged him to talk through the grief in pain he was feeling. I told Doug of my love for Peter, and the change Peter had made in his life. When I hung up the phone, I turned to the Lord asking for understanding.

I prayed for my son's life. I received an impression of the question: "Why are you grieving for your son now?" I then thought about a music tape Chris had bought me that had the title: "My ways are not your ways." Doug couldn't bear being in the house alone. He decided to spend a week in Southern California with his friend Lynn Ann. He wanted to get away and lie on the beach to think things over, but Doug said the talk with me helped him.

When he returned to Berkeley, he called and let me know he was home

again. It was important to Doug that I knew he was feeling good and going back to work. Doug shared his feelings about loneliness, and how much he missed Peter. Doug caught himself coming home and expecting Peter to be there with supper on the table. It was hard to sit down to a meal alone. The house was empty.

Doug was making preparations for Peter's service. In the months following Peter's death, Doug tried to keep himself busy. He rode his bike often in the hills. He loved the outdoors. The feel of the wind in his face brought pleasant experiences. Doug thought of his childhood in the mountains of Idaho, and the bicycle rides with Peter. Doug could feel himself healing as he adjusted to his new normal.

Hopeful Changes

Chapter 12

One day, as Doug rode, he stopped at an especially beautiful spot along the road. He was there several minutes, when another biker pulled up and stopped near him. They exchanged greetings as the other man tightened the chain on his bicycle. He finally turned towards Doug to converse. Doug soon found himself telling him about Peter, and the difficulty he had experienced this past month. Kris was an attentive listener.

When Doug arrived home, he called and told me of meeting Kris. I could feel something in my son I had not noticed before. He was afraid. He was afraid of being alone during his own illness. Deloy and I discussed the option of Doug coming home. I suggested to Doug that he consider moving home so he wouldn't be alone. It

seemed like a good idea at first, but we realized it wasn't practical.

He explained that he would receive better healthcare in the Bay Area. They were experienced with AIDS cases. His HMO⁶⁴ was only good at Kaiser, in Oakland.⁶⁵ Any medical care he got he would have to get at Kaiser. We had no way of paying for the expensive medication, tests, and other things he would have to have.

A few weeks later, Doug called. He told me there was a national AIDS Awareness Week being held. They were trying to get the government to release drugs DDI and DDC. Doug had been able to get AZT, and felt it was helping.

⁶⁴ HMO is an acronym for: Health Maintenance Organization

⁶⁵ Kaiser Oakland Medical Center is the flagship hospital of Kaiser Permanente, the largest managed care organization in the United States, through its Kaiser Foundation Hospital Division. Its signature 12-story, 420-bed tower was opened in September of 1972.

These other drugs were being put on hold for years of testing. There were people who didn't have years to wait. Doug felt people should have the right to try a new drug to see if it worked, rather than being denied the option. People were dying, so what did they have to lose?⁶⁶

He asked if I would call my state representatives to support the release of these new drugs. We had not kept Doug's being gay or his HIV status completely private. We had told good

⁶⁶ On May 30, 2018, President Donald Trump signed S.204, the Trickett Wendler, Frank Mongiello, Jordan McLinn and Matthew Bellina *Right to Try Act*. *Right to Try* opened a new pathway for terminally ill patients who exhausted their government-approved options and couldn't get into a clinical trial to access treatments. Although 41 states had already passed *Right to Try* laws, the signing of S.204 made *Right to Try* the law of the land, creating a uniform system for terminal patients seeking access to investigational treatments. See righttotry.org for more information.

friends and most of the family. We didn't tell Doug's grandparents, because they were elderly and we felt they didn't need the stress of dealing with Doug's illness.

I picked up the phone and began calling our representatives, one by one. One of the senator's aides' reaction caught me totally off guard. He informed me he didn't think the senator wanted to get involved. There weren't many AIDS cases in the state of Idaho. He felt AIDS wasn't an Idaho problem. I hung up the phone. I was angry.

It didn't lessen my pain just because my son happened to be living in California. I'm an Idahoan, so it was an Idaho problem. Something had to be done. I can't remember being more angry. I began calling all our friends, acquaintances, and anyone else I could think of. Everyone seemed responsive. Many didn't know Doug was gay and had AIDS. They wanted to help when they heard of his illness. I was pleased.

I was surprised how many were filled with compassion, understanding, and love. The next day, I called the senator's office again. I said, "This is Mrs. Nelson again. We spoke yesterday. I was wondering if you had received any calls about the support for the release of DDI and DDC?"

The aid laughed and said, "You've made your point. Yes, We have received calls. In fact, the phone has been ringing constantly since yesterday. I suppose you're the one responsible."

I smiled and asked, "Do you think the senator would consider this an Idaho issue now?"

"I have spoken to the senator, and he will do what he can."

The time had come to go public with the news of homosexuality and AIDS affecting me, and I was no longer ashamed. My only embarrassment was I had been embarrassed about this subject in the first place. Being gay was not what my son was all about. Doug was a

kind and compassionate person. I made the decision to call his grandmothers, and tell them what the situation was. Much to my surprise, they already knew. They had just been too polite to mention it.

The next item on the agenda was to call the local television stations. I asked them if they were aware there is a movement going on to try to get new drugs for AIDS released.

I asked, "Why haven't we seen anything about it on our local television stations?"

A couple of them were condescending, and said they would call back if they found anything. One station did believe the story was a relevant issue. They interviewed me, and it was broadcast in their viewing area.

Three newspapers arranged to interview me on the issue. When they arrived, they were interested in doing a story about Doug as an active Latter-day Saint member and an Eagle Scout

spreading the HIV virus. They wanted, *sales copy*. They weren't interested in any effort to get further medical help for AIDS victims.

I repeatedly emphasized the message I wanted to get out. They went away disappointed, and so was I. I wrote letters to the editors, and was disappointed when they were not printed. Our family was dealing with an unpopular issue.

We realized we were breaking new ground, and it would be tough to get things going. This was an issue people wanted to sweep under the rug, rather than deal with it. Information on the subject was unavailable in the Idaho medical community. We depended primarily on information from Doug. I became obsessed with the subject. I needed answers.

We knew of no other families who were facing this issue. I felt alone. I supported education classes we held in the area. The poor attendance was ap-

palling. People didn't realize this could possibly affect their life someday. In my studies, I encountered the theories concerning homosexuality. The theory about severe trauma in the third semester of pregnancy caused me particular concern.

The vivid memory of the automobile accident when I was carrying Doug, came back to haunt me. Doug and I talked at length about the guilt I felt. He tried to reassure me by saying, "I can't believe this is anyone's fault, mom. Please don't blame yourself. It won't do any good. No one is to blame. It's just one of those things that happens."

Doug's health was still relatively good, even though his T-cell count had dropped to 334. I prayed for him constantly. He had been lucky so far. No major infection had set in. Doug and I were getting to know each other better. There were many things about homosexuality I didn't understand. I had many questions. I wanted to know

about Doug's life. There was no subject I couldn't discuss with him. He was patient. Sometimes he would laugh, and tease me about my sheltered environment.

When I was outspoken during a television interview, Doug laughed and said, "Is this my LDS mother?" His LDS mother had come out of the closet too. I was mad. I was mad at the world. How could we ignore those suffering in the homosexual community? This was not what Christ taught. This was not The Gospel I had been reared with. Doug was patient. He taught me about unconditional love, what Christ's love is.

During the fall of 1989, Deloy and I were preparing to spend a month with Mark and his family in Arizona. Mark asked if I would teach a Cub Scout powwow early in November. We planned to spend Thanksgiving with them.

October 17 was my mom's birthday. The last few years, she had become a homebody. She had problems

with her back. Deloy had the day off, and we decided to spend the entire day with my mom to celebrate her birthday. We arrived there at about ten in the morning. My mom was busy in the kitchen when we entered through the back door.

She smiled. We embraced as I explained, "Deloy and I are planning on spending the day with you."

"That's wonderful," Mom exclaimed. "It's been almost two weeks since I've seen you."

"I know, Mom. I'm sorry. I don't get out as often as I should. I get busy and the time gets away from me."

We went out for lunch, and chatted pleasantly about the family and their activities.

After lunch we had a nice walk and then we sat in her living room and talked about everything. I couldn't remember a more pleasant talk with my mother. I shared all my feelings about Doug and his disease. I expressed all

the guilt I had been feeling. I talked of the sorrow I had in my heart. Mom held my hand as I spoke of the injustices I had unknowingly inflicted upon my son.

Crying, I told my mother how much I wanted my son to come home. I wanted to be able to sit face-to-face with him, and tell him how sorry I was. I wanted to hold him in my arms, stroke his beautiful hair, and look into his big beautiful blue eyes again. My mom held me close saying, "Be patient. It will happen. You've come such a long way. It will happen. I promise you, it will happen."

At the end of the day, Deloy and I drove home. I felt good. It had been a beautiful day. My heart swelled with love for my mother. I knew things were going to be alright. When we entered the house, the phone began to ring. Dropping my purse in the chair, I picked up the phone. It was Doug. There had

been a terrible earthquake in Oakland.⁶⁷ He was calling to reassure us he was alright. Except for broken glass, he had suffered little damage. I briefly told him of the day we had spent with his grandparents.

Hanging up the phone, I went to the television set. We were just in time for the nightly news. I was amazed at the devastation. Doug's home was almost in the middle of it. Doug was a mile or two away from the freeway that had collapsed. I was grateful Doug had called to reassure us. Later, when his brothers tried to give him a call, they couldn't get through.

I went to bed that evening thinking of my mother's promise. Yes, Doug and I were much closer now. We had indeed come a long way. A few days later, Deloy and I left for Arizona. We had a good visit with Mark and his fami-

⁶⁷ This called the Loma Prieta earthquake which was the strongest earthquake to hit the area since 1906.

ly. The three granddaughters were delightful. Deloy escorted the oldest to kindergarten each day. We told stories. I tried to teach them to crochet.

November 17 was a beautiful warm day in Arizona. We rose early. After breakfast cleanup, Cheri and I sat at the kitchen table, planning the menu for Thanksgiving dinner. I wrote a shopping list, while Cheri reviewed favorite family recipes. The phone rang, interrupting us and Cheri rose to answer it. I listened for a few minutes. I turned. I could tell something was wrong.

“What is it?”

“It's Steven,” Cheri said as she handed me the phone.

I took the receiver.

“Steven, what is it?”

“Mom, it's grandma. She had a massive heart attack this morning and died almost instantly.”

I sank to the floor. “This couldn't be true!”

Cheri slipped to the floor beside me, putting her arm around my shoulders.

Cheri looked up at Deloy and said, "It's Grandma Davis. She had a heart attack."

The next couple of hours were hectic as we prepared to drive back to Idaho.

I sat in the car thinking about my mother. I was grateful for the beautiful day we had. It would prove to be a comforting memory in the days to come. Doug decided to fly home for his grandmother's funeral. The next few days were filled with preparation for the funeral. It was the first time the entire family had been together for several years. We took pictures.

The day after the funeral, Doug suggested we go out to lunch. The conversation was pleasant as we ate. As we finished eating Doug reached across the table and took my hand. He smiled.

“Mom, I want to clear the air. I've done some things I'm sorry for. I want to say I'm sorry. I know I've hurt you both. I want to try to explain why I did some of the things I did.”

I squeezed his hand and replied, “I need to ask your forgiveness for some things too.”

DeJoy placed his hands upon ours. We talked for a long time.

Doug explained the internal pain that had caused him to lash out. He regretted that. Until now, he didn't know how to make things better. He realized he had been wrong. Doug expressed how things in his childhood hurt him; things I had done. I acknowledged my wrong-doing and shared with him our pain and hurt.

We all regretted the distance between us in the years past. I thought my heart would break as I realized how desperately I needed his forgiveness. This conversation cleaned our souls as we put all of the hurt out in the open.

Pain dissipated as we expressed love and forgiveness. My mom's promise had come true. I missed her terribly. I wished I could talk with her one more time. I wanted to tell my mom about the gift of hope she had given me.

The next morning we woke to a wild Idaho November blizzard. Doug's flight back to Oakland was canceled. The terror of his disease came rushing back as he realized he didn't have enough AZT to last him until he could fly out of Idaho Falls. Calls were made to Salt Lake City to find out whether a flight out of Utah was possible. My brother Ray had a transportation bus to pick him up. I kissed my son and the regrets of the past goodbye.

Doug's relationship with Kris was growing. His loneliness was disappearing. I missed my mother. I had already lost one son and I would eventually lose another. I wanted someone I could talk to who understood. I wanted to talk about how we felt isolated; that it

seemed this didn't happen to other families of our faith.

A Pillar of Support

Chapter 13

One morning, Doug called and he found me feeling especially blue. Doug realized I needed some assistance.

Things were going to get worse and I needed support to get through it. His counsel was to find a support group.

Doug said, "You need to find one another. You need to help one another. You need to be able to cry with one another. Experiences with someone else will help. Mom, you're not the only LDS mother who's gone through this. Promise me you'll find a support group."

I promised.

I knew I was going to have to get some strength from somewhere if I was going to be there for Doug as his disease progressed. When I hung up the phone, I pulled the phone book from the drawer to find a support group. There

were all kinds of groups but, there were none for parents of gay children. I looked at the list several times. I couldn't believe it. There were no support groups for people like me. I was all alone. I couldn't give up. I had promised.

I decided that maybe the Public Health Department could help me. A young woman answered the phone. She listened as I explained what I was looking for. My heart sank as I was told there were no support groups like the one I needed.

She paused then said, "There's a lady here who might be of some help. Let me connect you to her office."

I waited as I was connected. I explained my situation to her as she listened.

When I finished, the woman replied, "I am sorry. We don't have anything for parents of gay children right

now. We haven't been able to get a PFLAG⁶⁸ group going yet."

I had a sinking feeling as I thanked her. The woman may have sensed my despair as she stopped and said, "I usually don't do this. May I ask a personal question?"

I replied in the affirmative.

"Are you LDS?"

This was not the question I had expected.

"Yes, I am."

The woman went on, "Are you active?"

"Yes."

She then continued, "I do know a lady. I hope she won't mind if I give you her name. I can tell that you need to talk to someone. I'm going to take a chance."

⁶⁸ This is an acronym for "Parents/Families of Lesbians And Gays." This group was founded in 1973 by a mother and her gay son in New York City to support the LGBTQ+ community.

She gave me the name and phone number. My hopes rose as I hung up the phone. I spent several minutes looking at the name and phone number then debated, "What if Daisy Carson doesn't want her privacy invaded by a stranger?" I concluded, "What have I got to lose?"

I dialed the number. The phone rang several times before it was picked up with, "Hello."

"Is this Daisy Carson?"

"Yes, it is."

I must have sounded like a mad hatter as I rattled off my story. I wanted to get my story out before Daisy could tell me to get lost before she hung up.

As I finished, Daisy spoke again. The kindness in her voice stood out to me. Starting with my story, she told me about her two gay sons. She then told me of a group of LDS parents who met on the first Sunday of each month and

held a fireside,⁶⁹ using the scriptures. I wrote down the address, and the date and time of the next meeting. I promised Daisy I would be there.

Daisy then said, “Let us pick you up. I know how hard it is to do something like this the first time.”

I hung up and called Deloy. I said, “Maybe we’re not alone in the world. There are other LDS families like us.”

Two weeks passed slowly. I was eager to meet these parents who were struggling with the same issue I had.

⁶⁹ *Fireside* was a word first adopted in the 1930s after Franklin D. Roosevelt’s famous “fireside chats” on the radio during this same time period. The official term by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is *devotional* or *discussion*, but the informal term of *fireside* continues to be used in the LDS community.

Fast Sunday⁷⁰ finally came. We attended church, then went home to prepare a dish to take to the potluck supper held before the fireside. We drove to a pre-designated spot in Firth, and waited for the Carlsons to pick us up. A white van pulled up alongside our car. Two young men sat in the front and two older couples sat in the back. Daisy and Frank got out of the van and introduced themselves. They introduced the driver as their son, Glenn, and the other young

⁷⁰ In The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Fast Sunday is held on the first week of every month. The Fast usually begins on Saturday night and ends 24 hours later. Food, drink, and worldly distractions are to be replaced with prayer, holy discussions, scripture reading, and pondering and meditation on holy things. The money normally spent on food, drink, and worldly distractions are donated to those who are hungry and thirsty no matter where they are. Special Fasts can be held at any time, for any length of time, and for any purpose. A Fast can be the abstinence of one thing or many things.

man as his partner Tim. I felt at ease with the group immediately.

The fireside was being held in Pocatello, Idaho. We got acquainted as we drove. The other couple in the back were the Caldwells, whose gay son was married and had five children. I told them of Doug and his illness. Everyone in the car were active LDS people. I was surprised as we told each other of our experiences and feelings. Their experiences were similar to ours.

We arrived in Pocatello where the fireside was held. On entering the house, we were greeted with hugs. Several young men were present. Other parents were there also. I enjoyed talking to the gay young men. Most had served missions. One young man presented a discussion on forgiveness. There was no hatred here, only love and acceptance. All were from an LDS background.

Some of the young men had been excommunicated⁷¹ or were not participating in church, but each desired to be part of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

⁷¹ At this time in church history, every member represented The Church. If a person's behavior was not representative of Church standards, they were excommunicated. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints no longer performs excommunications. They now have Membership Councils to assist members to change their lives and to protect others. The Membership Council may restrict the member: For example, a pedophile could not teach children in Sunday School.

Membership is withdrawn only in extreme cases such as murder. Abortion, police action, and military action are not considered murder even if some church members think they are. The only other sin that requires the name to be removed from church records is plural marriage. Even rape and incest doesn't always result in a name being removed from membership. Practicing homosexuality is now considered on par with someone having an affair.

When we arrived home later in the evening, I called Doug. I was excited to share all we had learned about our new friends. I told him how impressed we were with the boys there. Doug seemed pleased. We were no longer alone. The friendship with the members of the group grew steadily over the next several months. I marveled at how much the boys reminded me of Doug. They shared the same gentle sensitivity. Their concern for Doug, although they had never met, was genuine.

I could feel myself becoming close to the group. The boys were becoming like my own sons. I enjoyed their company. A hug from one of them was almost like a hug from Doug. Sharing fears and experiences with the other parents helped us work out what we were going through. We found the reconciliation in their hearts gave us hope.

Doug coaxed us into spending Christmas with him in California. Deloy and I hated to be away from the rest of

the family during the holidays, but it had been a long time since we had spent Christmas with Doug. As Christmas drew near, I was becoming excited about the trip. We hadn't seen Doug since my mom's funeral. Doug picked us up at the airport. It was good to see him. I tried not to think about his illness.

Doug introduced us to Kris. I caught myself comparing Kris to Peter. Kris was nice, but he was different from Peter. Where Peter was blonde, Kris was dark. Where Peter let Doug lead, Kris took charge as the leader. Peter had enjoyed cooking, while Kris was into computers. They were different. I told myself that comparing was not fair to Kris.

I could see Kris's kindness and concern for Doug. Doug was happier than I had seen him since Peter's death. This is all that mattered. I was grateful for Kris. Doug was no longer alone. Kris had his own apartment in San Francisco so we were able to spend most of the

time with Doug alone. Doug had kept the house because it was close to his business.

When we arrived, Doug prepared a light supper of fresh vegetables and stir fried shrimp. After supper, we sat in the living room catching up on the latest news. Doug shared the scrapbook about Peter. It brought back many pleasant memories. It seemed odd to be celebrating Christmas with temperatures in the 80s.

Doug had decorated a small tree. It was nothing like the hectic Christmas in Idaho with active grandchildren playing and laughing while we waited for Santa to make his appearance. Christmas Day still had a special quality. The quiet, simple atmosphere felt like the true spirit of Christmas.

Doug flashed his famous smile as he handed us the gift he had bought. I unwrapped the small box. I removed the lid from the box. I was delighted. Doug had given us tickets to the

Broadway musical *Les Misérables*.⁷²

The play was on tour in San Francisco during the holidays. The evening came for the play, and I dressed carefully. All of my life I dreamed of attending a Broadway play. I debated what to wear, and changed several times.

Doug then said, "Don't worry about it, mom. Anything goes in San Francisco."

I was ready to go.

We climbed into Doug's old Mercedes and drove to San Francisco to pick up Kris. The Curran Theater⁷³ was magnificent, and reminded us of the

⁷² *Les Misérables* second national tour opened in San Francisco on November 1, 1989, with the last performance held January 27, 1991. The musical was based on the French historical novel by Victor Hugo first published in 1862.

⁷³ The interiors and exterior of Curran Theatre can be seen in the film *All About Eve*. All of the scenes that took place in the theatre were filmed at the Curran Theatre.

grand gold rush days in San Francisco.⁷⁴ We arrived at the theater early and visited to get acquainted, and entertain each other with stories.⁷⁵ Doug sat next to me as he had when he was younger. We both liked to share our comments about the production as it progressed.

The overture began to play. Doug took my hand and gave it a squeeze. I smiled at him and returned the squeeze. I could see the pleasure he was feeling about the gift he gave us. The play was magnificent. We were having such a good time. As a special song or dance

⁷⁴ The Curran Theatre, located at 445 Geary Street between Taylor and Mason Streets was opened in February 1922 with a seating capacity of 1,665 people.

⁷⁵ Audiences and staff have reported hearing eerie sounds throughout the theater and some have even claimed to see the apparition of Hewlett Tarr who was murdered there in 1933 by Eddie Anderson.

number was executed, with held hands, we would smile broadly at each other.

Kris and Deloy enjoyed the enthusiasm we were both displaying. As the play ended, we walked back to the car. Doug and I walked in front, reliving each moment of the play. Kris had arranged for dinner at the Elite Café.⁷⁶ The food was tremendous. When we got ready for bed that night, I was exhausted and happy. I hugged Kris and thanked him.

He hugged me back saying, “I got as much from it as you did.”

When it came time to fly home, I hated to leave. It had been such a wonderful week. The concern for Doug I had felt when I arrived had been relieved. Kris was there. He was not HIV positive. I knew he would be there when Doug needed him. The weeks passed.

⁷⁶ The Elite Café on Fillmore Street was opened in 1981 by Sam Duvall and Tom Clendenen as a bastion of New Orleans-inspired cooking. It closed in 2019 due to high operating costs.

Rollercoaster

Chapter 14

Doug and I talked at least once a week. He kept us informed about his illness. We agreed we would not try to protect each other by withholding information. Doug had finally obtained the DDC drug. DDC, combined with AZT, caused a rebuilding of his T-cells for a while.

Doug began to have some bad days. Illness appeared for no reason. The first was a major stomach infection called MAI.⁷⁷ MAI made him unable to digest food. He developed a severe intolerance to dairy products.

It became more difficult for him to work, although he struggled to work as much as possible, even if only for a few

⁷⁷ MAI is an acronym for *Mycobacterium avium-intracellulare*. MAI infection is an atypical mycobacterial infection, which is severe in people with AIDS.

hours a week. Kris was helping him financially. Deloy offered to help, but Doug wanted to be as independent as possible. In 1991, the rough times intensified. He had bad days and good days; I prayed each day for him. I asked Doug to let me come be with him.

He replied, "Please, mom, don't deplete your resources coming back-and-forth. When it gets bad, I will want you here, and I will call you to be by my side."

I was grateful he wanted me to be with him. It was hard to realize that he would be close to the end of his life when I saw him next. It was important to us that his wishes be respected. Doug was doing a lot of reading and studying. His early teachings gave him a reference to a higher being. He started to reach out for that. Books about philosophy and religions became his focus.

When he would read a book that he especially liked, he would call me and share its ideas. He encouraged me

to read. I kept telling him that I didn't have the time. I liked spending my spare time doing hand work.

He answered. "At least put the book in the bathroom. You don't know what you're missing, mom. There's much to learn out there."

I followed his advice and put a book in the bathroom. Much to my surprise at the end of a few months I had read several books.

One I had especially enjoyed, I sent to Doug. One day, he called me all excited. He had finished reading a book about Buddhism.

He related the use of meditation: "We teach ourselves complete and total gratitude. There's no self condemnation or condemnation of others."

I smiled and said, "That sounds like the teachings of Jesus to me."

He agreed and laughed, "You know, I guess it's the same message."

As I hung up the phone, I reflected on all the things we talked about. I real-

ized I had not been disturbed about Doug's excitement with Buddhism. I was amazed I had come far enough to accept different points of view.

It felt good to allow him to have his own ideas, thoughts, and perceptions about things. He was impressed by meditation. As time passed, he felt he had mastered the technique.

He would tease me saying, "You should learn to meditate. I'll have to teach you someday."

The year wound down, and Doug was becoming more ill with each passing week. He started to make plans concerning his healthcare and his death. Later in September, Kris called.

Doug had outlined his funeral preparations. He asked Kris to call and talk to us. Doug wanted to be cremated, and he wanted his ashes spread on his favorite beaches in California and Hawaii. Cremation was a new idea for us. We hadn't known anyone who had been cremated, except Peter.

I heard stories through the years that cremation was against gospel principles.⁷⁸ My son, Steven, decided to discuss the subject with the bishop. The bishop looked to see if there were any policies on cremation in the church handbook. He couldn't find anything against it. In fact, the bishop said cremation was a common practice among The Saints in certain parts of the world. Deloy and I felt much better after that. We made the decision that Doug's wishes would be honored.

The illness was progressing. He had several other major infections. As each one came, I would pray with all my heart. I kept his name constantly on the

⁷⁸ Most likely a reference to the sacredness of the body and its remains, as well as numerous references in the Bible indicating burial as the preferred way of caring for bodily remains. For example: 1 Kings 13:31, "When I die, you must bury me" or Matt 8:21, "Let me go and bury my father."

temple prayer roll.⁷⁹ Each time he would find some medication that would help, and he would feel better for a while.

I found myself asking the question, “What is truth?”⁸⁰ There is not one perfect person in the world. Only God can determine worthiness. I believed He loved Doug for the person he was, and accepted Doug on those terms.

In thinking, “What is truth?”, I came to a conclusion that I wrote down after stating, “God helps us all to grow, no matter where he finds us.”

*God loves me, this I know.
Wherever I go, there's His Son.
He lets me be what I want to be.*

⁷⁹ Names for an unscripted formal group prayer within the LDS culture requesting that the Lord will be mindful of those suffering with life's challenges.

⁸⁰ A question Pilate asked Jesus in John 18:38.

*He guides me, but doesn't push.
He readily forgives mistakes I've made.
Let God, not man, guide me to grow.*

I became obsessed with the thought that maybe the Lord will give me a miracle. If only I could have enough faith; If only I prayed hard enough. I decided I would pray each day for four things: 1-Doug would feel good today. 2-Doug's T-cells would be rebuilt today. 3-God's will, to be done. 4-The Lord would grant me the strength to get through the day. On some days my faith was strong. On some days I realized what a weak person I was. My faith faltered.

I had been attending the temple weekly. I would put Doug's name on the prayer roll each time. Friends from all over would put his name on the prayer roll in their local temples. There were many prayers being offered for him. Doug rallied. I was convinced all the prayers were making the illness easier

on Doug. Whenever Doug's health would rally, I felt prayers were being answered.

October 1991, Doug called me to tell us about the devastating fires on the hillside above Berkeley and Oakland.⁸¹ The beautiful area where he loved to bike was all in flames. He was upset about it. He had gone to San Francisco with Kris to escape the intense smoke. One of his concerns was that the Oakland Temple was threatened.

Through all the devastation, Doug's home was preserved. He was all right; another answer to prayer. Near the end of October, he called telling us he would like to come home to visit. I was thrilled, but I knew it would be the last time he would come home. Kris was going to come with him.

⁸¹ This fire was known as the Tunnel Fire, the Oakland Hills fire storm, and East Bay Hills fire. It killed 25 people and destroyed thousands of dwellings.

We planned to be home for Thanksgiving because Wynette was expecting a new baby; in the first part of November. I talked with Doug about the date the baby was expected. If he was home for Thanksgiving he would be home about the time Wynette would have her new baby blessed.⁸²

He was excited and said, "Mama, do you think Wynette and Garret would mind if I hold the baby? I can't remember the last time I held a newborn baby."

Everyone, except Mark and his family, were there for Thanksgiving and the new baby's blessing. Doug felt good while he was home. Kris was attentive and took good care of Doug. I called everyone when Doug and Kris arrived. One by one they all came by. When Wynette and Garret came, Doug and Kris were sitting on the couch.

⁸² A prayer offered in front of the congregation that publicly announces a new baby being entered into the records of the church.

Wynette walked into the room carrying her baby, Jacob. Doug hesitated about asking for the baby, but Wynette placed Jacob in his arms. Doug gently pushed the blanket away from Jacob's face. I felt the tears sting my eyes as I watched Doug's eyes moisten. He gently kissed the baby's forehead. "He feels good to hold," he said. I glanced around the room at my family. We were all feeling the impact of this special moment.

Kris was raised in Catholicism and knew absolutely nothing about Doug's religion. Our family filled three rows of seats during Jacob's blessing at church. It was a beautiful sight. As the meeting progressed, Kris kept asking questions. He didn't understand the sacrament; Doug explained it. He didn't understand the blessing of the baby; Doug explained it. Doug answered several other questions.

We were home for several days. We had such a good time together. We

played games, laughed, and joked. We watched all the old home movies. When the time came for Doug and Kris to leave, Wynette took her baby over and handed little Jacob to Douglas. Doug kissed his little forehead. This was the last good memory of Doug for many of us. I knew Doug forgave me and loved me, no matter what mistakes I had made or what flaws I possessed now.

Wynette always loved Doug. How I wished I would have listened to her when she was eight-years old saying, "Shouldn't we love him anyway?" I cannot understand my past ugliness now. I wish I had listened rightly. I could've saved the entire family a lot of pain.

After Doug left, I realized Doug had come home to say goodbye. Several times, I caught him looking at the mountains. I watched him looking at the house, the rooms, the pictures on the wall of each member of the family in a special way. He had come home to say goodbye.

“Goodbye” was a difficult realization, but I still clung to the hope of a miracle. Deloy and I stayed active in our support group we called, “Reconciliation.” The group was extremely helpful. Each month we would gain strength from the boys and the other parents.

As we finished each fireside, we would return home and I would later call Doug to tell him all about the meeting. Doug and I discussed the subjects given during the Reconciliation lesson. I tried to convey to him the spirit we felt. I listened attentively as Doug shared his thoughts on the subjects.

Doug was not well, but he wasn't bad either. The illness was maintaining its status quo. On Doug's birthday in 1992, I called him as I normally did. We had a long talk. Doug seemed to want to share all of his feelings and memories with me. He shared how he felt about the many aspects of his life: his friends, his family, religion, politics, and his work. Interacting with one another, the

conversation was stimulating and interesting for us both.

As I hung up the phone, I had a heavy sense of foreboding. I could feel our time slipping away. There were many things I wanted to say before it was too late. I wanted to tell Doug of the tremendous blessing he was in my life.

“Thank you Doug for being the vehicle of my understanding. For teaching me to reach beyond myself and my culture, and accept and love everyone as God’s children; to recognize people for who they are, not for what I am.”

Doug helped teach me to reach for personal revelation and the arm of the Lord. He taught me to reach beyond what others say and search out the truth for myself. Through our experiences, God teaches us true compassion and love. “Thank you Lord. I love You in the trials you have given me.”

I had bought Doug a book for his birthday. I had written my thoughts on the cover page.

When he received it, he called to say, “Mom, Thank you so much. I've shared this with everyone. They are jealous they don't have a mother like mine.”

This statement made me realize there were mothers everywhere who didn't understand the love God wants us to have. Their children were hurting. It's a sacrifice to learn to understand gay children. Do moms need to feel like a perfect mother? No. I'm a long way from being a perfect mother; however, I am a better mother for having to understand a difficult situation. Whenever De-loy and I would go to our *Reconciliation fireside*, we would share many feelings and thoughts about Doug. Some of the other members of the group reached out to Doug. Some of them called and talked to him. Doug was impressed by

their concern. It gave him a contact with his LDS background that he missed.

Deloy and I were amazed at the young men in our *Reconciliation fireside* group, and how they hung onto their testimonies of the gospel even though they were rejected as members of the church. It was becoming more evident to me that Christ expects us to love one another under all conditions. Any discussion that seemed to point fingers of blame or judgment would make me angry.

Prayer had such a vital part in my life. I went to the Lord time after time about the anger I was feeling.

True Testimony?

I have a testimony; the gospel is true.

I know exactly what I'm to do.

Do I see you alone; needing repair?

I read scriptures that I quote.

In church I have awoke.

But do I listen; see your needs?

*Jesus, Have I done what I'm to do?
When the day comes that is true,
Will I bring back those who were blue?*

I realized that to love unconditionally, I had to allow others their opinions. They would not always coincide with mine. The Lord answers prayers. I was growing. The answers and growth were not easy. At the same time, Doug was growing also. One day Doug called to tell me of the major infections the doctor had found.

We had another of our frequent long talks. We grew to know each other's inner pain, although there were many physical miles between us. Praying fervently for the strength to get through the agony of my son's terrible disease, I prayed for the Lord to take away the suffering. As the weeks passed, I began to ask the Lord to let His will be done.

In May, Doug called; he was getting sicker. He would call and tell me

how bad things were getting. It was tearing me apart to know he was suffering. I wanted a miracle badly. That September, Deloy's mother Eunice passed away suddenly. She was well into her 80s and I was hoping she would die before Doug did. I did not want Eunice to go through the sorrow of losing another grandson. She now would be waiting for Doug when his time came. Doug was too sick to attend his grandmother's funeral. His absence seemed to intensify the grief of Eunice's passing.

In the latter part of October, Doug started experiencing intense pain in his lower abdominal cavity. He endured a battery of tests. He called me with the news that the doctors were looking for liver lymphoma. I struggled for strength to deal with the possibility. I remembered vividly the valiant fight Peter had with lymphoma. The tests were finally completed and the results were back.

Doug called, excited. I could feel the relief in his voice. He was half laugh-

ing and half crying explaining, “Mom, I have a hernia.”

Under other circumstances, I might have been concerned. The hernia needed surgery, but the news seemed to give Doug a new lease on life. Doug wanted to go back to Hawaii. Kris and Doug wanted to take the opportunity while Doug was feeling well enough to travel. The doctors said the surgery could wait until after they returned home.

Dark Days

Chapter 15

Doug enjoyed the trip immensely. As the holiday season was approaching, the calls from Doug gave me hope that we might have a merry Christmas. The morning of the hernia surgery, Doug called, telling me it would be a day surgery, and he promised to call me when he came out of the anesthesia.

Late afternoon, Doug finally called and told me everything had gone well. Although the surgery had gone well, this actually marked the beginning of several other problems. Not long after, Doug lost the use of his right hand. A MRI was ordered to see if a brain tumor could be found. There was none.

The Idaho winter we had that year was one of the worst in many years. Out in the swirling blizzard, I could see children running and playing in the huge drifts. A white Christmas was going to

be a certainty this year. As I turned from the Christmas card scene outside, my heart felt heavy as I realized how afraid I was.

On January 6, the call I had been dreading, came. Kris's voice came from the receiver, asking me to come as soon as possible.

"Doug needs you. He's calling for his 'Mama.'"

The words tore at my soul. Doug was 6'4" tall, and his weight was now down to 120 pounds. He was unable to eat much. What he did eat was being lost to diarrhea and vomiting. His condition was serious. I called Deloy immediately and made arrangements to get to Salt Lake International Airport that Friday. I confirmed plane tickets and called the rest of the children.

Chris responded instinctively. "Rhonda and I are going with you. I can't let you go down there all by yourself. We'll get our tickets on the same

flight. We'll meet you in Salt Lake Thursday night."

Deloy wanted to go with me, but couldn't get off work without several days of prior planning. I called David at work.

"Mom, I'm going to take Thursday and Friday off. As bad as the weather is, I don't want dad to drive back by himself."

Thursday was a dismal day, but the freeway was clear of snow. Deloy and David drove to the motel not far from the Salt Lake International Airport. I watched out the window as the snowflakes softly fell. It was a relief when my oldest arrived. By the time Chris and Rhonda drove in, the snow had stopped. I could see twinkling stars in the crisp sky. The flight left at 7:00 AM the next day.

I was relieved to see the sun shining. The ordinary short flight to Oakland seemed to take forever. The sky was clear blue as the plane finally touched

down. Kris met the three of us at the gate. I could see instantly, Kris was nervous and anxious. Doug was in the hospital. They were trying to build his strength so they could operate.

Kris told us, "You need to prepare yourself. Doug doesn't look himself. He is thin." Kris took my hand and gave it a slight squeeze as he continued, "He's sick. He has been asking for you. I promised him I would take you straight to the hospital."

Chris picked up his rental car as Kris loaded my luggage into Doug's car. The small caravan drove quickly through the twisting streets and onto the freeway. I was riding with Kris. I listened intently as he filled me in on Doug's condition.

The hospital finally came into view. Kaiser medical was several stories high, and filled several city blocks. I was beginning to feel overwhelmed. City traffic and lots of people made me nervous. I usually didn't face unfamiliar sit-

uations without Deloy by my side. I was flooded with loneliness for the man I loved. The elevator climbed to the 10th floor. Kris led us down a long hall towards Doug's room.

Doug lay in the bed with his eyes closed. As he heard the door open, he opened his eyes and turned his head. He smiled broadly. He held his arms out. I stepped toward him. His eyes were large. They seemed to fill his whole face. I loved his big blue eyes framed by long dark lashes. We held one another until Doug realized Chris and Rhonda were there also.

Doug was touched, and with tears flowing he embraced them. I spent my time at the hospital. Chris and Rhonda stayed four days. We were in daily contact with the family at home.

I felt like I was living in a dream. Each day I would rise early to go to the hospital. I spent the long days sitting beside Doug's bed. I kept my hands busy with knitting. Doug watched.

“Mom, I could use some slippers. I plan to get out of this bed as soon as possible.”

I loved making things for Doug. He appreciated everything I had made for him through the years. The Woolworth’s⁸³ was across the street from the hospital.

At the first opportunity, I slipped out of the room and went across the street to get some yarn for the slippers. Doug had neuropathy⁸⁴ in his feet and hands. It hurt him to walk. He watched me knit for several minutes then said, “Mom, do you think I could try that? I want to see if I can still knit.”

⁸³ The Frank Winfield Woolworth Company first opened on February 22, 1879, as "Woolworth's Great Five Cent Store" in Utica, New York. Business started to decline in the 1980s until 1997 when it rebranded itself as Foot Locker.

⁸⁴ Damage to the nerves causing tingling, pain, and numbness.

I reached into my bag and pulled out an extra pair of knitting needles. Within a few minutes, Doug was knitting. We chatted back-and-forth as we worked the yarn into their chosen patterns.

We were interrupted by the physical therapist. He stood at the foot of the bed and watched Doug work with his stiff fingers to form the stitches. He smiled approvingly saying, "If you keep that up you won't need me."

Doug returned his smile. Doug's energy came and went. When he felt strong enough, he practiced knitting, but he spent much of his time sleeping. I sat quietly by his bed, knitting the slippers he requested.

One day, Doug seemed especially tired. I sat in my usual place next to his bed. The television was playing a movie Doug had started to watch. I glanced at it occasionally to keep up with the plot. Outside, the rain was softly cascading down the windows. From my chair, I

could see the clouds shrouding the hills of Oakland. The scars from the fires could still be seen.

The hospital seemed especially quiet. An occasional phone ringing in the distance broke the silence. I looked up as Doug took my hand softly stroking them with his fingers.

“Mama, Are you grateful for the experience we've had?”

I put my hand on top of his. My eyes searched his face. His eyes were gentle. In my mind I was struggling with his question.

I hesitated, then replied, “I don't know Doug. It's been tough at times.”

He held my hand a little tighter and said, “Think about it. Would we have come this far if we hadn't had this experience?”

He told me, if he had the chance, he would choose differently. In the choices he made, there was pain but there were countless blessings in it. I was grateful for the lessons we had

learned. I was grateful for him. I contemplated his shortened life. I thought about the valuable lessons that had enriched our existence.

The Choice

*As one prepares to come to earth.
They make preparations for their birth.
A special mission from God to do.*

*Teaching God's special kind of love.
Hard but short will be the days.
To learn patient unselfish love.*

Doug surgery was successful and the doctors got the CMV virus⁸⁵ under control. Doug began to regain his strength. He hated the hospital and he

⁸⁵ Cytomegalovirus is easily controlled by someone with a healthy immune system. In people with AIDS, CMV can affect the brain, esophagus, intestines, and lungs. It usually causes problems in people with a CD4 white blood cell, also called helper T cell, count of fewer than 100.

wanted to be at home. Doug wanted to die at home, Kris promised that he would accommodate that desire. Kris arranged for hospital equipment and in-home nursing. The day finally came when Doug could return home.

At times his pain was intense. There were days when he was unbearably cross. I admired Kris for his patience and ability to hide the hurt when Doug would lash out at him. I tried to follow his example and hide the hurt when he lashed out at me. Doug's friends came. The girls took me out to lunch and on shopping excursions. I would feel guilty about the relief I had getting away from the house.

On his occasional good days, Doug did his best to make me feel more comfortable. One day, I was helping Doug change his clothes after he threw-up. I brushed his hair away from his eyes. He reacted by slapping my hand away. The day had been especially bad. Doug's pain was intense and the med-

ications made him sick. We were all extremely tired and emotionally exhausted.

As his hand struck me, I couldn't hold the tears back, and I left the room abruptly. Kris quickly followed me.

He took me in his arms as I sobbed softly against his chest.

"It's the drugs. You have to remember, it's the drugs. It isn't the real Doug. You can't let this hurt you. He needs you."

I had stepped onto a foreign soil: A world where the idea of family closeness was not practiced. Doug's friends found it unusually intimidating that Doug's family rallied around him like we did. They found his relationship with his mother hard to understand.

One day, The Relief Society president⁸⁶ called and asked if I would like to attend church with her family.

Doug encouraged me to go.
“Mom, you need to go. It would help you a lot.”

When Sunday morning arrived, I almost changed my mind. I hated to leave Doug. As I approached the chapel nestled in the Berkeley Hills, I sensed an immediate familiarity.

I was like a starving man at a banquet. The music was beautiful. The sacrament was spiritual. The prayers were what I needed. The talks touched my heart in every way. The lesson in Re-

⁸⁶ The Relief Society president is called by the bishop to guide the Ward sisterhood in reaching out in love to those in need in the *Ward* and community. The motto of the Relief Society is “Love never fails.” (1 Cor 13:8)

lief Society⁸⁷ buoyed me up and gave me strength. It was a beautiful experience. I couldn't wait to get home and share it with Doug. As I talked, he watched me with his large eyes.

When I finished talking, Doug took my hand and held it between his two large thin ones as he said, “You need to stay close to the gospel Mom. You are going to need it. I know it will help you get through the next few months.”

As tears filled my eyes, I kissed his forehead. He gave my hand a slight squeeze before I went to the kitchen to prepare dinner.

Several days later, I went to the mailbox and collected a small bundle I took to Doug. I sat down to read the

⁸⁷ The Relief Society is one of the oldest and largest women's organizations in the world. It is a philanthropic and educational women's organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints founded in 1842. As of 2023, the Relief Society has over 7 million members in over 188 countries and territories.

newspaper as Doug sorted through the mail. He then handed me a newsletter from the Berkeley First Ward.⁸⁸

“Mom, you might be interested in this. Looks like they're doing some fun things.” A sadness washed over Doug's face. “Sometimes I miss it. I can see it would probably be helpful to me right now.” He resumed reading the mail. I watched him for a long time.

I was surprised he was getting a newsletter from the church. I asked him about it.

He replied, “I've had my records moved wherever I've moved.”

I was confused. I had been under the impression he had been excommunicated⁸⁹ while he was in Utah. He ex-

⁸⁸ A local unit of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saint located in Berkeley, CA. See <https://localunits.churchofjesuschrist.org/berkeley-1st-ward/> for more details.

⁸⁹ That is: Excommunicated either by choice or by discipline.

plained that was not the case; instead he kept in contact with the church by having his records moved with him. I was grateful he was still a member of The Church. He was still hanging on to the teachings of his youth.

One of Doug's friends gave him cable television when he came home from the hospital. The television helped fill the hours. One afternoon, Doug and I were spending a quiet, rainy afternoon watching different shows. Doug was weak and bedridden. It was one of the most wonderful afternoons of my stay and it was also one of Doug's better days. I got up to fix him some ice cream. As he flipped through the television channels he said, "Mom, hurry, come see what I found."

I finished dishing up the ice cream, and went into the living room. Across the screen, the movie *Doctor Zhivago* was beginning. We spent the rest of the afternoon recalling the memories the movie brought to our minds.

One evening, there were two earthquakes. I rushed through the house to take down mirrors and breakable items. It was an ominous sign of the world that was falling apart around me. Doug was nauseous. The only thing we could give him for any relief was marijuana. There would be a couple of good hours, and then he would be extremely ill. Doug was on many different drugs that caused mood swings. The pain became intense. Morphine had to be prescribed. His doctor said he could have as much as he wanted.

Remarkably, Doug began to gain strength and was feeling better. He progressed so he could even get out of bed for short periods. Kris and I decided I could probably return home. It seemed this crisis had passed. I missed Deloy.

About a week before I was due to leave Berkeley, Deloy flew down so he could have some time with Doug. A friend drove me to the airport. I found it

hard to contain my emotions as I watched the plane land.

As Deloy stepped through the gate, I threw myself into his arms sobbing uncontrollably. Could I deal with the future? With Deloy by my side, I knew that the uncertainty would be easier. Kris had arranged for nursing care when he had to be away. The doctor had explained Doug could be in his present condition for months.

Just Love Me

*Love me rather than judge me,
For all the difficulties and trials.
I strive to find the Lord each day,
And will be glad He made The Way.*

During the next few months, Doug rallied. His voice sounded much stronger when I talked to him on the phone. He was even able to walk around. He was eating and putting on some weight. David and Steven flew

down together and spent several days. Their time with Doug was solemn.

One evening, several people had come to visit Doug. The subject of life after he passed away was being discussed. Both Steven and David were deeply touched. David finally rose and left the room. One of the girls followed him to apologize.

"I guess you don't understand how much Doug means to us," She said. "He's been a part of our lives for the past 13 years."

Fighting back the tears, David answered, "He's been an important part of my life for 37 years. He's my brother. The same blood runs through our veins. You will close this chapter of your life, but our family won't be able to shut the door. He is part of us and a part of us will die."

She then saw the love through David's tears. As she turned to leave the room, she met Steven in the doorway. She saw the same in his eyes. These

men did have a special love for their dying brother.

When Doug's birthday came around in March, he felt well enough to take a trip. Kris had bought a small motorhome. My hopes rose again.

Maybe there would be a miracle, and Doug would get better. At the end of the trip, Doug was discouraged. He had to use a wheelchair and was embarrassed by it. It had been a major production to take along the special foods he required. There were many foods he couldn't tolerate. He was disheartened.

Doug called me on my birthday in May. He sounded good. I still had an image in my mind of how he was when I left him. I expressed how concerned I was about him. He assured me he was feeling much better. We talked for a long time. I expressed my feelings about the weeks I had spent with him. I talked to Kris too. It was good to be

able to talk honestly with the boys and clear up any misunderstandings.

I couldn't help wishing I could have this relationship with everyone I knew. It was a special gift. Doug told me a card was on the way with a special surprise. When the card arrived, it contained a recent picture of Doug riding his bike. I was overjoyed to see the progress he had made. His courage amazed me. He was not going to give up. He was fighting a hard, difficult battle.

In the early part of November, I had to go into the hospital for a day-surgery. The doctor found I had a bleeding ulcer. While I was recovering, Kris gave Doug an early Christmas present: They flew to Hawaii for a couple of weeks. When Doug told me about the trip, I had a haunting feeling. Were things worse than Doug was letting on? There was no way I could tell for sure. What I did not know is he had developed a lung infection.

The doctors told him if he felt good enough to go on a vacation, he could go ahead and do it. While he was in Hawaii, he called several times. Doug was especially concerned about my health, and was relieved I had been diagnosed and treated. Doug returned to his home in Oakland mid-November. Doug felt good until the last couple of days of that November.

Doug's chest had started hurting from a fungus. The doctors started medication, and felt the fungus was responding to the treatment. He expressed how much he missed us, so Deloy and I made tentative plans to go to California right after the holidays. Later in the week, David talked to Doug.

David called me right after hanging up the phone with Doug.

"Mom, Doug sounds weak. When did you talk to him last?"

"The day before yesterday. He sounded good then." I hung up the

phone, and told Deloy of David's concern.

Deloy responded, "You better call and see what is going on."

I dialed the number. Kris answered the phone. Recognizing my voice, Kris explained that Doug couldn't come to the phone. He was ill. He had been like that all day.

I said, "I'll call in the morning. Kris, Tell him we love him."

Doug was sleeping a lot. The next morning I tried to call, but the line was busy.

I gazed at Michael's picture. It was like I was hearing, "Don't worry mom, I'll take care of him."

I found myself responding aloud, "Remember now, he is your big brother."

Realizing what I had said, the tears dropped. I turned on the vacuum. The phone started to ring.

Turning the vacuum off, I picked up the phone.

“Hello, it's Kris.” I knew from his voice the news wasn't good. “Doug is dying. He wanted me to call and ask you to pray for him. He can't talk. He wants you to know how much he loves all of you.”

I gasped for air. I couldn't breathe. I was lightheaded. I anticipated this call for months, now it was here.

Struggling to control myself, I answered, “Kris, I'm on the first plane. Tell him I'm coming.”

“You'll never make it. It's a matter of hours. He is unable to breathe. I'm waiting for the nurse to come now.” I glanced at my watch. It was 10 o'clock.

“Kris, Are you alright?”

“Yes, yes. I'm fine.”

“Kris, I love him so much. I don't want to let him go. Would you please put the phone to his ear? I can tell him how much I love him.”

“Sure. Here he is.”

I could hear a terrible raspy sound as I gently said, “Doug, I love you. We

all do. I miss you. Goodbye, my sweet baby. I do love you more than I can say.”

Kris came back on the phone. “He heard you. He tried to smile. I’ll call when something happens.”

I slowly put the phone back in its cradle. My family had to be called. I had to speak to Deloy. We spoke briefly. Deloy headed for home. I began calling everyone. The next few hours were a blur with the children arriving. The local relief society presidency and the bishop came by to make preparations. My brother Ray’s family, David, my stepfather, and Deloy’s sister all came to lend support.

Wynette and my two small grandchildren were the first to arrive. Brianne hugged me quietly, then went to the sofa. Jacob watched his mother and sister as they comforted me. Jacob tottered towards me. I picked him up and sat him in my lap. He wrapped his chubby arms around me, and put his

blonde head against me. The memories of 35 years before came to me when another blonde haired, blue-eyed, two-year-old held me while I grieved for Mike.

Kris called back about 2:00 PM,⁹⁰ and said Doug had quietly slipped away about a half-hour prior, shortly after his last words expressing his love for his family. The long struggle was over. Our family embraced one another, then prayed.

We held a memorial service on December 5, 1993, exactly two years to the day when he was home in Idaho last. He was cremated according to his wishes. Believing Doug's memory could best be served by being open and honest, our family printed the cause of death as AIDS. The response from the community was wonderful. Many who did not even know our family sent cards

⁹⁰ November 22, 1993

and called. There were many who confided their family had a similar situation.

Doug did not die in vain. Doug was fine. He had completed his earthly mission. Now he was in the arms of a loving, compassionate Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Journey

*Life can be sad, or bad
And it's occasionally glad
But, it's all I have to learn*

*I still touch you in my dreams
I gaze into a distant country
A place of Christ's Grace*

*I was called on to let you go
Thanks to God, I now know
What love means*

Jeanine's Open Letter to Doug

What was this all about? Love. Love teaches us not to judge unkindly. Love and understanding brings people together. Love changes lives. Love is the foundation of all relationships. Love comes in all sizes and shapes and brings all shapes and sizes of happiness. Love gives us a reason to be better than we are. Love is the foundation of everything good in the world. One type of love is the love a parent has for their child. I tell parents, "Love your children and do the best you can to show this love."

I had a dream last night about you Doug: I had a big day with you. I received a letter. I got a call. I held you as a chubby, good natured baby. I stood beside you as we looked into the eternal universe. I died and you had children to carry on my name. It was just a dream. Or, was it? I'm not sure.

I taught you Doug the best I knew how. I don't know much and I could have been much better. I had a rough life yet, I tried to give my children a better one. I remember when you went on your first campout. Before I knew it, you were an eagle scout, then a man. When you went away to college, Doug, your memory gave me hope you would one day return.

There on our wall were pictures of you kids. The focus of this arrangement is a picture with Christ saying the words, "I didn't say it would be easy, I only said it would be worth it."

Scenes race through my mind of the many memories: "Mom, I won the speech contest!" Then, "Mom, I have the lead in the school play!" And, "Mom, I've been asked to be the teacher's quorum president!"⁹¹ Next

⁹¹ Teacher is one of the ranks in the Aaronic priesthood of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The bishop is the highest rank of the Aaronic priesthood in a ward.

was, “Mom, I have my Eagle⁹² requirements done!” Then shortly after, “Mom, I completed my Duty to God!” Before I knew it, “Mom, I’ve won a scholarship to college!”

When God created the earth, He allowed Satan to tempt Adam and Eve, stating their own experience would be the vehicle of learning the difference between good and evil. God provided an Atonement of His Son, Jesus Christ, for when things go wrong.

Sometimes, as parents, we fight hard to keep our children from determining good from evil by their own experience. We want our children to be better than our experience. We want them to find happiness and avoid misery. Obedient children bring a special joy to parents, but what happens to the prodigal son?

⁹² This is a rank in the Boy Scouts of America program considered by many to be the apex of achievement even when additional ranks, or honors, may be obtained.

When you were born Doug, I didn't know the lessons you would teach me before you died. Only God knows if we're strong enough to endure trials of learning. I learned what unconditional love must be like. You don't appreciate a child fully until you see them struggle. I would like it if we didn't struggle, feel the pain of being different, and did everything right. Such was not to be. Sometimes children become what we don't like. This forces us to grow in an unexpected way. I cried for you. I would have died instead of you. I fasted for you. I prayed for you.

It is sissified for boys to be affectionate like you were. I noticed a nurturing behavior not common in other young men, like the private talks with me after midnight; how you played with dolls along with your sister; how you recited stories to her as you watched over her temperature at night. Your unusual tendencies showed through even as you tried to fool society.

I had thought parenthood made me wise. Now I know the real prize is to be teachable. The Lord has blessed me with a son who was “gay” — a homosexual. I have known shame, embarrassment, anger, and doubt. But, these discoveries of new circumstances and feelings have taken me to a distant country. My world has been brightened by reconciliation. I now have a new understanding. I now have a heart touched by compassion. I now can feel the pain of people; the desire to be loved, their fear of the unknown.

When the days were dark, I cried out for relief. I was overcome with grief. I reached out to find the meaning of compassion. Love turned my darkness into a lighted jewel.

My neighbor down the street has fine things: her house, her yard, her children, and her example of gospel light. I strived hard, yet I drew the Old Maid card. As the days got longer, my problems seemed to get worse. My

heart cried out, "Oh, Jesus, where are You when I need You? Haven't I done what You asked me to do?" Jesus then put His arm around my shoulders and whispered to me, "He's Your son." I thank the Lord each day for my boy. He was an unwelcome noise. He was a board full of nails. He was a bicycle left in the driveway. He was clothes left in the rain. He was grass stains and muddy shoes. He was a grin with the words "Mom, I love you."

Is a mother's life worthwhile even when she sees her son die? Did I help him grow? No! He helped me! What a turn of events! What a surprise outcome! The years flew by like a silent dove. I wondered: "What will he be?" "What will he learn from life's lessons?"

As I grew older, I felt unsatisfied. I imagined a time when my teaching would be passed down. When I died my son would kneel in prayer and thank the Lord for the saintly mother who had taught lessons of virtue, love, and pa-

tience. He would have children as a living memorial. All those dreams were just dreams.

What makes life worthwhile? Joy doesn't come from a sunny day, fun, money, or honors. Joy comes from the things in life all rolled up into living. Joy was a boy picking wildflowers for his mother, a baby kiss, a crayon drawing on the refrigerator, a "Mommy, I love you." Joy comes from noticing a small face created in the image of God, beautifully growing until it becomes the face of a man. I learned to just love my son.

Stories by Jeanine

Why The Easter Bunny?

In the middle of the forest stood a large oak tree. The branches spread out containing many wonderful secrets. If you look close, you will see a hidden nest in the new green leaves. Inside the nest there are four eggs. The eggs themselves have a special secret.

The promise of new life is happening all over the forest. Farther down the tree, is a small hole. If you watch carefully you can see two squirrels scurrying in and out. Deep down in the hole, two baby squirrels hide. They too, are part of the rebirth of life coming to the forest.

The sun's rays made the droplets of rain clinging to the fresh green grass sparkle. Mother rabbit cautiously wiggles her nose as she quickly surveys the scene outside her cozy burrow nestled in among the roots of the big tree. She hops out into the sunshine followed by

her four baby bunnies. Three of her hungry children hop into the new grass and begin to chew away. They relish the sweet taste of the tender blades of grass.

Little Esther rabbit stops as she hops from the hole. She is caught up by the beauty that surrounds her. The drops of rain sparkle like jewels. Off to one side she sees some wild flowers. Her eyes drift upwards to the top of the tree where she spies the bird's nest. Mama bird's head barely is seen as the Daddy bird brings her food. She sits on the eggs keeping them warm. Eagerly she waits for the day when her little ones crack the shell to make their entrance into the world.

Esther sees the two squirrels scurrying up and down to the hole in the tree. Forgetting her own hunger, Esther hops to the mound of grass. She is impressed with the beauty of the world around her. She smells the clean air after the rain. Mother rabbit watches Es-

ther as she gathers in the beautiful scene before her.

“Mama, the forest looks beautiful today. Everything looks fresh.”

“It is a special day,” Esther’s mother replied, “It’s Easter.”

“Easter! What’s Easter?” Esther says as Mother rabbit hops over to a spot where the warm sunshine falls against a log. She calls the other children to her. Placing Esther close by her side, she tells them this story:

“In a far off land a wonderful, kind, and gentle man walked the hills. His helpers taught people about kindness for each other. He taught with stories called parables. As he walked the country, he healed people who couldn’t walk, or see, or who had other challenges. Sometimes he even brought people back to life. This man’s name was ‘Jesus.’

“As He traveled the land many humans began to be jealous of Him. They didn’t want to believe the things

He taught about kindness. But the children listened to the stories because they had great faith. Jesus loved the children and blessed them. He told the people they needed to believe like the children.

“One day, soldiers arrested Jesus. They gave Him a trial based on hearsay, and made fun of the things He taught. They even made a crown of thorns, which they roughly pushed onto His head. The thorns pierced His skin to make him bleed. The men laughed and ridiculed Him as ‘The King of the Jews’ as they beat Him. Finally, they decided Jesus had to die. They made a heavy cross and forced Him to carry it through the streets of the city to a hill called Calvary. The soldiers nailed Him to the cross. He hung there until he died.

“Sadness filled the world when he died. The animals of the forest were especially sad. We knew He was ‘The Son of God.’ The human children were also sad. All the creatures of the forest

wanted to do something to help the human children remember Jesus. In the Great Forest Council we chose the gentlest animal in the forest to be in charge of this great project. The children of the world called him the 'Easter Bunny.'

"Each spring when the birds lay their eggs, the Easter Bunny visits the human children. He brings them baskets filled with the newly tender shoots of grass and eggs to symbolize the rebirth of the world. New life emerges when the baby birds peck their way out of the shell. This represents Jesus coming out of the tomb.

"When Jesus died, those who believed Him placed Him in a tomb. They witnessed that He came back to life on the third day. This gave all of them the promise they, too, can have life again. All the animals of the forest have their babies in the spring symbolizing the new life Jesus promised.

"It is important for us to believe the things Jesus taught, especially, how

to be loving and kind to each other. So, every Easter, the Easter Bunny comes to visit the children bringing his basket filled with the promise of new life. Each child helps the human grown-ups remember what Jesus taught. This is the true meaning of Easter.”

The Doll Princess

In a far off land, a small kingdom lay nestled in a peaceful valley. The kingdom was ruled by a kind king and queen who had a beautiful daughter. The princess was loved by all the people in the kingdom. Her long dark hair hung down her back in soft curls. When she smiled her large brown eyes twinkled. She was kind and caring. The entire kingdom loved seeing her as she traveled about in her small carriage.

Each morning, the castle would awake to the sound of the singing birds as the princess fed them from her window. The sound brought joy to the kingdom as they started each new day.

One morning, the king and queen woke to silence. No singing of birds could be heard. The queen rose from her bed thinking the princess must be ill. The queen and king rushed to the princess's bedroom. The room was empty. They could find no sign of the princess. The birds sat in the tree out-

side the window. They hung their heads in sadness. No beautiful song came from their throats.

Soon the entire kingdom was awake and searching for the princess. The day ended with no clue to her disappearance. The people searched for days, weeks, and months. They found no sign of the princess.

The kingdom no longer sang. The king and queen remained in the castle. Everyone missed the princess. The children in the kingdom watched for the princess's carriage to come. All the people in the kingdom were sad.

Far across the sea, in a large city, there was a quaint toy shop tucked into the corner of a back street. The toy shop was owned by a kind old toymaker.

One day the toymaker was tending his shop. He heard the small bell on his door tinkle. He went to the front of his shop to find an old woman with a large box standing at the counter.

“May I help you?” the toymaker asked.

The old woman placed the box on the counter and began to open it. As she removed the wrapping paper, she revealed a large doll. The toymaker gasped. He had never seen such a beautiful doll. She had huge brown eyes and long brown hair cascading down her back in long curls. Her dress was fit for a princess. “Oh my, what a beautiful doll!” the toymaker exclaimed.

The old woman carefully lifted the doll from the box.

She spoke in a soft voice saying, “This is a special doll. I would like you to sell her for me. The doll must be sold to someone who needs her and will love her.”

The toymaker said, “I don’t usually sell merchandise this way. I make my own toys to sell.”

The toymaker watched the sadness come into the old woman’s eyes. The kind toymaker couldn’t stand for

anyone to be unhappy so he added, "But, for such a special doll maybe I can sell her for you."

The old woman smiled as she emphasized, "You must remember to sell her to someone who needs her and will love her. The price you get does not matter."

The old toymaker placed the beautiful doll on a shelf where she could be seen by those passing in the street. The doll sat on the shelf for days, then weeks. Soon months passed.

A soft rain was falling as the toymaker heard the bell on the door summon him to the front of the store. Standing in the shop was a beautiful young woman. She was gently shaking the rain from her hair as she gazed upon the beautiful doll.

Pointing to the doll she said, "She is such a beautiful doll. Is she expensive?"

The toymaker said, "Would you like to buy her?"

The woman said, "I don't have a lot to spend. Twenty-five dollars is all I have. She looks like my daughter Marie. She fell ill and has not yet recovered. I thought she might enjoy the doll's companionship as she can't be around other children currently."

The toymaker looked thoughtfully at the young mother and said, "I think she would love it! If you want, I will take the twenty-five dollars and you can keep the doll. And, if your daughter doesn't fall in love with it, you can bring it back and I will refund your money."

The young mother replied, "Oh, she will love it! I know she will be happy when I give it to her. She has few toys she can play with. Thank you so much. You are such a kind man."

The toy maker took down the doll and wrapped it up most carefully and placed it in a box. He watched the smiling young woman as she carried the box out of the store and disappeared down the street.

As the young mother returned to her apartment, she went to the bedroom where Marie lay. Marie opened her eyes as her mother walked in. Her mother kindly greeted her and said, "I have something for you." She laid the box on the bed and began to carefully open it. Marie watched with her big brown eyes as her mother lifted the doll out of the box. Marie managed a smile in spite of her great weakness.

Her mother placed the doll in her daughter's arms and said, "I was right. The doll does like you." Marie weakly held the doll close and gave it a gentle kiss. Marie smiled at her mother who smiled back with moistened eyes.

As the days passed, Marie's mother noticed the pink returning to Marie's cheeks. She watched as Marie grew stronger with each passing day. The doll was Marie's constant companion. Marie grew to love the doll more each day. Finally the day arrived when the doctor encouraged Marie to get out

of bed and walk around her room. It wasn't easy at first. As the days passed Marie's steps grew stronger until she was walking outside. Finally she was able to play and go to school again. Marie's mother noticed the doll laying on the bed alone while Marie was outside playing with a friend.

That night as Marie was getting ready for bed, her mother mentioned the doll on the bed all alone. Marie gathered the doll into her arms and climbed under the blankets saying, "Mama, this beautiful doll helped me to get better again, didn't she?"

Her mother replied, "She sure did!"

"Mama, Do you think I ought to give this doll to someone else who needs her?"

Her mother thoughtfully asked, "You want to give up your doll? You love her so much!"

Marie hugged the doll and said, “I do love the doll but she needs to be with someone who needs her.”

Marie’s mother smiled, kissed her girl, and said, “I will find someone who needs her tomorrow.”

The next day, the toymaker was surprised when Marie’s mother came to the store with the doll. He was pleased, however, when he heard how the doll had helped Marie get better. He was putting the doll back on the shelf when he heard the bell again. He turned to see the old woman standing in the doorway of the shop. “I have come back for my doll,” she said.

The toymaker put the doll back in the box. The old woman smiled warmly, thanked him and left the shop. For some reason the toymaker felt good.

Far across the sea, in the kingdom, the sun was coming up, bringing a new morning. The king and queen sleepily opened their eyes. What was it

that they could both hear? Were the birds singing?

They jumped from their bed and rushed to the bedroom of their princess daughter. Much to their surprise and joy, the princess' daughter was happily feeding the birds from her window. The birds were merrily singing and the whole world seemed happy. "Mama, Papa, I have had the most beautiful dream. I went across the sea and helped a sick girl get all better. It was such a good dream. I want to tell you about it."

The king and queen looked at each other thinking, "Had we been dreaming too?"

Ashley's Rooster

Ashley was five. She had long brown hair and big brown eyes. Her smile lit up the room.

Ashley's family bought a farm. She was excited. When the furniture was unloaded, Ashley decided to explore and soon discovered an old chicken coop.

Running back she shouted, "Mama, Mama, come see! There is the neatest, building out in the back. What is it for?"

Her mother explained about the chicken coop. She told Ashley it had once housed chickens and turkeys.

"Can we get some chickens and turkeys? Can we, Mama, can we?" Her mother promised when they got completely settled they would buy some chickens and turkeys.

Ashley helped her mother put things away, all the time chattering about chickens and turkeys. Her mother and father answered her many ques-

tions. With each day Ashley's excitement grew.

Finally the big day came. Ashley's daddy climbed into their pickup and drove to town. Ashley spotted the big farm store with a sign with chickens on it.

"There it is! There it is! Stop here Daddy."

He parked the truck and Ashley scrambled out. She ran ahead of her father into the store. She could hear the soft peeping of the chickens and turkeys.

"Daddy, I want this one."

Ashley picked each one carefully until they had enough to fill their chicken coop.

The man in the farm store carefully put the chosen birds in a small crate. He placed the crate in the back of the pickup. All the way home Ashley watched the crate out the back window of the pickup.

When they arrived home, Daddy lifted the crate out of the truck and carried it to the chicken coop. Putting the crate on the floor of the coop, Daddy lifted the lid and placed each of the birds on the floor. The birds seemed to enjoy their new home as they peeped and pecked their way around. Ashley filled their water can.

Months passed. Ashley fed and watered her birds every day. One of Ashley's favorites was a big white rooster. His feathers were white as snow and on the top of his head was a beautiful large red comb.

The neighborhood soon discovered what a beautiful singing voice Ashley's rooster possessed. Each morning, right at seven o'clock, Ashley would rouse from her sleep to the clear, melodious crow of,
"Cock-a-doodle-doo!
Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

It was such a delightful sound that everyone in the neighborhood rose each

morning with a smile. The alarm clocks remained idle as the neighbors began to depend more and more on the delightful crow each morning from Ashley's rooster.

One day, Ashley's mama explained that animals on a farm serve a purpose. Some animals have to be sold to provide money for the family and some are raised to be eaten. Chickens provide eggs. Ashley understood she would have to choose one of the turkeys to be eaten for Thanksgiving. This made Ashley sad. She couldn't decide which turkey would be Thanksgiving dinner. Mama understood how much Ashley loved her rooster and explained to Ashley how important he was to the neighborhood with his beautiful wake-up song.

One turkey was bigger than all the rest. Ashley watched him as he paraded around the farm yard. He wasn't polite, pushing the other turkeys and chickens out of the way from the feed.

He was proud, holding his head high, seeming to say, "I'm bigger than all the other birds. I'm prettier than all the other birds. I'm better than all the other birds. Not one of them can do anything better than me."

The proud turkey listened each morning as Ashley's rooster sang his wake-up song.

"I can sing better than him," the proud turkey thought.

Everyone woke up the next morning to, "Awk, Awk, Squawk, Awk." His normal "gobble" was not bad but this wake-up song he sang was terrible. The rooster woke up with a start. The neighborhood was already awake. The neighbors were looking out their windows. They were not smiling. They were frowning!

For several days the turkey continued to wake up the neighborhood with his awful squawking. Ashley's rooster was sad. His beautiful red comb began to droop. His feathers turned a

sad gray color. Ashley worried about him. She remembered what her mother had told her about each animal having a special job on the farm. As she watched the proud, impolite turkey prance around the farm, she made her decision.

Ashley's daddy caught the big turkey. He put him in a large crate and drove him to the butcher shop. The next day, the turkey did not wake-up the neighborhood. Ashley put her rooster on the fence and begged him to sing. At first he was too sad. Ashley's rooster realized the neighborhood was still asleep. It was his duty to wake them. He was out of practice. His first crow was weak.

Ashley encouraged him, "You can do it! You can do it!"

The rooster looked at Ashley, took a big breath, puffed up his big chest and sang a tremendous,
"Cock-a-doodle-doo!
Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

All over the neighborhood, the neighbors sleepily awoke. They wondered if they were dreaming.

They all wondered, "Was that the beautiful song of Ashley's rooster?"

Again, "Cock-a-doodle-doo!"

Yes, it was Ashley's rooster. They jumped out of bed ready for their day. They were all smiling. Some were even singing along with the rooster. Ashley hugged her rooster and told him he was the best singing rooster in the whole world.

When Thanksgiving came, Ashley's mother took the big turkey out of the freezer, stuffed him and cooked him to a golden brown.

Ashley took a big bite and exclaimed, "This turkey did his job well. He was the biggest turkey on the farm and the most delicious!"

Afterwords

The story “Just Love Your Son” was told by Jeanine with the perspective of Jeanine. I would be most interested in what Lynn Ann’s letter said that Doug claimed to be true. We know from her own words, Jeanine had trouble accepting hurtful realities and perceptions of others. We know from her own words that such a temper could flare. We know by these things she was all too human.

Jeanine recognized she was a broken woman in many ways and yet tried to give what she didn’t have. Out of concern, she reacted in the moment. She often acted a devil with the intent of an angel. She had anger issues from her past that hurt those she loved. Yet, she tried to love when she herself felt unloved.

She was intelligent, yet ignorant of the things she wanted to understand. She was like a broken machine trying to fulfill a quota. I think the thing I have

learned from this account is that Jeanine did her very best to give her children a better life than she had. I think she succeeded in doing that.

Doug's Temple endowment was completed a year after Doug's death on November 25, 1994, by his eldest brother Chris, with family in attendance. Jeanine stood beside Chris in the temple's prayer circle.

Many years later, in 2017, Jeanine's oldest son, Chris, was sitting down in front of his PC to do some work. Unexpectedly, a pop-up appeared on the screen with a marriage certificate dated May 22, 1977, and a death certificate dated July 11, 2017. Both of these documents had Lynn Ann's name on them. She was one of Doug's greatest defenders and friends.

Chris noticed Lynn Ann had recently died. Did Lynn Ann's sister, Mary Ellen, send these documents to Chris? No, and Chris didn't know how these

documents got to him, or why they appeared on the screen.

Doug lived with Lynn Ann while they were both attending BYU in Provo, Utah. Doug and Lynn Ann were the best of friends who always remained in touch with each other. Lynn Ann even helped care for Doug for a time as he lay dying in Berkley, California. Chris contacted Lynn Ann's sister, and she confirmed both Lynn Ann's marriage and death were true.

When Chris called Wynette, he said, "Are you sitting down? You had better sit down. Doug was married."

Doug and Lynn Ann got married because the university in Provo would not allow them to live together without being married, even though Doug was gay. They were friends and nothing more, but the school did not care.

From the threat of expulsion from the school, they either had to get married, or they had to find separate accommodations, which they could not

afford. They chose a marriage out of convenience. Neither had married anyone else, nor had either of them had the marriage annulled, nor had either filed for a divorce. They were sealed as husband and wife in The Idaho Falls Temple on September 21, 2018.